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Performing Social Labour: Digging, Dwelling and the City

Bruno Peter Roubicek

**A Doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of Doctor of Philosophy for
Birkbeck, University of London
December 2017**

Declaration

I, Bruno Peter Roubicek, declare that the work presented in this submission is my own original work,

Signed Date.....

Abstract

This thesis asks how performing the labour of digging can be a social process that engages with the ecologies and economies that define our experience of dwelling in the city. The thesis contributes to understanding in the field of performance practice and theory by developing original performances that experiment with degrees of audience participation and proximity. I ask how my performances of digging respond to the particular regulatory, social and ecological conditions of a public park, the garden of a theatre and Birkbeck's School of Arts.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold's understanding of dwelling as a function of human activity through the landscape has framed my analysis of the ecologies of digging and dwelling. Henri Bergson's concept of duration frames discussions of temporality. Karl Marx and economist John Maynard Keynes provide insight into the economics of digging as wage labour and as a 'theatre of social labour'. My performances of digging holes to plant flora, digging holes for wildlife ponds and digging to restore a pathway are critiqued and developed with theatre philosopher Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty' and Jacques Rancière's 'emancipated spectator' in the light of three historical case studies. I ask how and why radical performance group The Living Theatre, performance artist Allan Kaprow and land artist Agnes Denes performed the labour of digging and how they used digging to negotiate the economic and/or ecological conditions of life in the city. The cities of New York and London are an essential part of the global financial system and I examine how localised performances of digging in these cities can enact pharmacological economic strategies of care and the generation of knowledge.

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I am extremely grateful to my supervisory team; Dr Aoife Monks, Professor Carol Watts and Dr Fintan Walsh for their help and encouragement and for guiding me through this research project. I have also had valuable guidance from Dr Sophie Hope, Dr Louise Owen and Anthony Shepherd at Birkbeck. For their contribution to the *Little Ecological Arts Festival* thanks to Dr Camilla Nelson and research students at Birkbeck; Dan Eltringham, Natalie Joelle, Tom White and Mendoza in particular. Without Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment's generosity in sharing their stages with me, this thesis would not have been possible. I am also grateful to The Friends of Albion Millennium Green and particularly Ann Field who encouraged my digging experiments on public land. I am very grateful to my partner, Iris Borgers of Grow Mayow Community Garden for her patience, inspiration, horticultural advice, gifts of plants and loan of spades during this research project.

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Abbreviations

AMG	Albion Millennium Green
ANT	Actor Network Theory
GMCG	Grow Mayow Community Garden
IMF	The International Monetary Fund
LEAF	The Little Ecological Arts Festival
NASA	North American Space Agency
PaR	Practice as Research
TDR	The Drama Review
TLT	The Living Theatre
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
US	United States of America

Introduction

This PhD dissertation seeks to understand how the performance of digging can work to negotiate the economic and ecological conditions of life in the city. Developing a methodology that combines practice based research 'in the field' with performance analysis and scholarship, the thesis builds knowledge about how digging can be performed and contributes to the field of theatre and performance studies and to the genre of site-specific theatre by evidencing the ways that performances can correspond with particular spatial and social contexts.

In the generation of new understandings and insight I have learned as a 'participant observer' *with* the performance of digging during performance experiments in particular places and among particular communities: digging holes for trees and a pond and digging a pathway in a small public park in London and another pond in the garden of a theatre in the city of Reims in France.

My own practice has emerged through thirty years of professional stage performance and, in the last decade, personal performance practice. The way I perform has changed considerably in that time but I discuss below how the experience of seeing Forced Entertainment in the 1990s and working intermittently with the company as a guest artist since 2003 and during the early part of this research project has impacted on the methodological choices I make. Analysis of my practice in this dissertation follows a chronological path allowing me to track its development from non-art practices before the start of this study; digging holes to establish a community orchard in Albion Millennium Green (AMG) in 2010 to the performance of digging a pond in the garden of a theatre in Reims in 2013, to the studio presentation in the School of Arts at Birkbeck for the final assessed performance (in early 2017).

My practice is made evident to the reader in video and photographic documentation and in my written descriptions. Likewise, the practice of other artists has been made evident to me through their written descriptions, photographs, transcriptions and video recordings but also on-line resources and the critical appraisal of scholars and other practitioners. Documentation and written description of a live event can only be received as a partial view of the whole and it is important to acknowledge that video recordings and photographs can tell very different stories to the original live performances.

In the case of my own performance practice however, I argue that a different view can also reveal affects, meanings and experiences that were hidden from both the spectators and myself as participant observer. For the final assessed presentation of practice, visitors to the presentation will see texts and video documentation that tell a different story to both the original live event and the live digging they will witness, but also evidence important strands in my argument.

My experiments do not exist in isolation but are determined by a mesh of historical, artistic, social, economic, ecological and political contexts that provide frameworks for critical analysis of both my own practice and the practice of others who have picked up a spade and put it to work while being watched. In part A of the first three chapters a case study provides a lens through which to understand and develop the methods and techniques I use in my own practical experiments that are analysed in the second part of chapters one to three and the final presentation described in chapter four.

The three case studies evidence a general trend in terms of methodology from the theatre orientated performance of The Living Theatre (*Turning the Earth* 1975) in chapter one, to the 'performance art' practice of Allan Kaprow (*Trading Dirt* 1982- 1985) in chapter two and the 'land art' of Agnes Denes (*Wheatfield – a Confrontation* 1982) in chapter three. They all used digging (in New York City, Pittsburgh and Milan for example) as part of their creative practice. The development of practice in the case studies sometimes overlaps and regresses in chronological terms from foundational practices of The Living Theatre (TLT) and Kaprow in the 1950s and 60s to more recent works by Kaprow and works by TLT and Denes that have occurred during this research project.

The questions that I ask are:

1. What experiences and affects are generated by performing the labour of digging or watching others dig? How do the case studies' differing approaches to performing the labour of digging contribute to the development of my own practical experiments?
2. How do the artists in this study seek to break down spatial and ontological divisions between the audience seated in an auditorium of a theatre and the actor on stage or between the viewer of a picture on a gallery wall and the artist who painted the picture? What is the relationship between artist and spectator when digging is performed?

3. How and why is the labour of digging performed? How do performances respond to the site of performance and the community through which the performance moves and how do artists experiment with the duration of performance events in everyday locations?
4. How and why does the performance of digging unsettle the economic relationships that determine who is allowed to dig where? How does digging challenge and resist the 'free market' economy of art production and propose alternative 'rules of the house' based on an economy of social labour? What is the relationship between production, the labour of digging, the labour of performance and the labour of scholarship?
5. How do digging practices negotiate the ecological relationships between earth, air and water that are often restricted in hard-surfaced cities of tarmac, concrete and steel? Speculating about the ways that performers and artists might respond to the ecological crisis, this thesis asks how digging as a social cultural practice gives form to strategies of resistance to the entropic state and to pharmacological strategies of repair, care and knowledge generation.

Performance, labour and dwelling are considered here as human activity through a place and through time. The activity of digging and the labour of written contextual and historical analysis are the methods I use to explore both ways of dwelling and ways of performing in specific places and communities. The variety of forms, sites, durations and social contexts I examine allows me to gauge and understand how degrees of participation and proximity can impact on the reception of the performance and contribute to understanding in the field of site-specific theatre. The conclusion will apply insights generated by the thesis to the specific conditions of production and reception that are present on the theatre stage. The objective of this introduction is to explain how this thesis negotiates these key terms: place, community, labour and duration in the context of performance, dwelling in the city and the activity of digging.

In this thesis there is a focus on my experiences and performances of digging in London, the place I have dwelled in longer than any other and I ask how artists in North American cities and particularly New York experimented with digging as part of a post-war radical aesthetic of art production and performance practice that laid the foundation for the performance methods I use in my own experiments.

Contextual, theoretical and historical research has helped me think about my practice and directed my choice of case study that leads to the next practical experiment, further thinking, scholarly research and further practice. The stylistic and formal choices I make in the development of my performance practice are founded in my experiences as a professional theatre performer, particularly with Forced Entertainment and I will discuss below their influence on the performance methods I use. However, in the main body of the thesis performance methods are explored, critiqued and developed alongside performance theory and the digging practices of TLT, Denes and Kaprow. The latter's explicitly non-theatrical performance, alongside Artaud, John Cage, Richard Schechner and others, helped to lay the foundation for Forced Entertainment's radical experiments with what theatre can be in the contemporary world.

My experiments with digging are also founded in my experiences before this research enquiry began in the non-art or 'everyday' environments of building sites, parks and private gardens for example and the thesis plots the development of my practice from the everyday context of a small public park in London, Albion Millennium Green (AMG)¹, to the constructed performance event *Man Digs Pond* and the presentation of digging with words, video and live action for the final assessed presentation at Birkbeck's School of Arts as a part of the *viva voce* examination. The assessed performance will mark the conclusion of the practical element of the thesis but it will also lead to new questions about performance that will generate more thinking, direct more reading and influence further practice.

To negotiate and understand what an ecological performance might be and describe my thinking in this dissertation, I use the languages of performance theory, of philosophy and anthropology and I attend to thinkers who are interested in an ecological approach to artistic practice. Philosophers Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour have each attempted to think through the ways that art can reflect on the ecological crisis. Social anthropologist, Tim Ingold engages with the practicalities and labours of creative production and dwelling.

By way of background and to help me explain the theoretical and practical underpinning and trajectory of the thesis, I examine below two early experiences of digging: on a sandy beach at the age of fifteen months and five years later when I wrote about Neil Armstrong digging on the moon. These are not urban contexts but they were experienced while I was living in London and their brief analysis here serves several

¹ See Appendix 1 for an artist's impression of an aerial view of AMG.

² *OED*, Second Edition, Volume 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 58.

important functions. They show how I view 'place' in this thesis as a function of the ecological and economic conditions that determine who can dig and for what purpose. They highlight the difference between the experience of performing the task of digging and the experience of seeing digging from a distance. These two contrasting experiences of digging evidence the ways that practice and scholarship can work together to generate knowledge about digging and performing. Finally, digging in the sand on a beach and digging up the moon evidence a paradox and a tension that is revisited throughout this study: digging can be a primary means of establishing or contesting ownership, sovereignty and economic control over land and geology, and it can also be a playful and affirming exploration of the ecology of a place.

Digging and Doing Ecology



Figure 0.01. (Above) Photograph and close-up of the author digging on Newhaven Beach, Sussex 12 May 1964. Photo: George Roubicek

My first documented experience of digging was on Newhaven Beach in 1964 (Figure 0.1). My father photographed me sitting in damp sand. A bucket rests in front of me and piles of sand are dotted around. I hold a spade in one hand at head height and appear to be thrusting it towards the wet sand. I am digging *through* the sand, water and air not

immersed *in* it but I argue a living part of the emerging landscape. I am experiencing the touch, sound and taste of the materials and the weather: a salty sea breeze or windless calm, the warming sun and the physical effort of an infant body learning to perform a new task and learning with the ecology of a place.

Ecology is viewed in this thesis as the entanglement of transactional processes existing between earth, air and water that define the places that we dwell through in the biosphere (the sphere of life). According to the OED, the prefix 'eco' is derived from the Greek, *oikos*, meaning house, dwelling or habitation.² The Greek, *-logia* 'study of' gives us the scientific discipline Ecology that seeks to understand the material transactions that constitute life in the places through which we dwell. The way to understand these constantly emerging processes might not only be to investigate, observe and record them as climatologists, geologists, biologists, physicists, chemists and geographers are able to do but also to experience them in the context of practical performance experiments.

Scientists engage with ecology by performing the tasks of measuring and mapping. Philosopher Timothy Morton, anthropologist Tim Ingold and social scientist, Bruno Latour offer a more nuanced, uncertain and contingent approach to the generation of ecological understanding. All three make a strong case for artistic practice and performance practice as a way of thinking through the ways that humans might dwell together in the future. What also unites these three thinkers is their belief in the need to re-configure the human relationship with nonhuman things, both living and non-living.

The ecological thinkers that have illuminated the processes and experiences that are occurring in my experiments share my desire to expose, understand and respond to what Morton describes as Earth's "ecological emergency"³. Object-orientated ontologist, Morton, argues that the end of the world was set into motion about 12,000 years ago when humans in Mesopotamia transformed from roaming nomads into sedentary agriculturalists. Permanent settlements required a system of beliefs and behaviours that set humans against other things: controlling, enclosing and separating humans from the non-human. Morton confidently asserts that the world ended in April 1784 when James Watt patented the steam engine; "an act that commenced the depositing of carbon in Earth's crust – namely, the inception of humanity as a geophysical force on a planetary scale."⁴ The end of the world for Morton is a slow and lingering end (in human terms) by 'hyperobject', that is

² OED, Second Edition, Volume 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 58.

³ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 103.

⁴ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 7.

by the things that are dispersed over vast areas and are intimately interconnected or enmeshed with other things including humans, yet are impossible to understand or conceive of in their entirety. Oil, gas and methane are hyperobjects that were already influencing what Morton calls “the warm golden stuff burning my face at the beach”⁵ when I sat in the sand and played with a bucket and spade. Weather, according to Morton is a local pseudo-reality, the immediacy of which hides the looming presence of a warming globe.

Morton dispenses with the ideas of a ‘world’ and a ‘nature’ that we must preserve or return to. The end of the world “is the beginning of history, the end of the human dream that reality is significant for them alone. We now have the prospect of forging new alliances between humans and non-humans alike, now that we have stepped out of the cocoon of *world*.”⁶ For Morton, artistic and political practice must turn away from an illusionary human orientated world and, like the infant playing in the sand, relate instead to nonhuman things. It is not too far of a stretch from digging on the beach via Morton’s call for arts practice that collaborates with the nonhuman, to the two iterations of my performance experiment *Man Digs Pond* that I describe in this thesis (chapters one and two).

The title *Man Digs Pond* is intended as an ironic take on banner headlines that celebrate human achievement: “Everest Conquered” or “Fastest Man Alive ” perhaps. A pond celebrates only the frogs, newts, plants, rocks, mud and other things that dwell in its stagnant waters. In *Man Digs Pond* the stated ambition is transversal rather than up through the atmosphere. Or rather my ambition is down through the earth’s shifting outer crust, the lithosphere, into the uncertain dark ecology of soil, landfill and hyperobjects like the carbon deposits, plutonium isotopes and plastics that mark humans as a geophysical force during the epoch of The Anthropocene.

My practical research might be seen as an embodiment of human rethinking in relation to earth, trees, frogs, water etc. As the title of this dissertation makes clear, this is a social project that aims to understand the correspondences, feelings and relationships generated between humans; artists, audiences and collaborators. However, there is also an ambition to include other than human things within the social. Adapting the title of Bruno Latour’s monograph, there is an attempted ‘re-assembling of the social’⁷ to include the

⁵ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 103.

⁶ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 108.

⁷ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

nonhuman. The difference between my own creative response to the ecological crisis and Latour's, as I will outline below, is that in my experiments authorship is dispersed away from the artist and towards the other. In so doing, I argue, the work embodies a kind of humility that does not aim to teach the audience from an authorial position about the precarity of their existence but enters into a correspondence that invites them to think and do their own ecological thought.

Sociologist of science Latour, using theatre practice and language littered with references to performance, proposes that the scientific and social realms must be reassembled to accommodate all the living and non-living 'actors' in the networks and systems that make up the 'global circus'. Like Morton's rejection of 'world' and 'nature', in *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*⁸ Latour advances a system that does not place the human as 'above' or outside of nature, or in a constant battle to conquer and control it, but intimately connected with nonhuman things to the extent that the concept of nature as separate to the human is meaningless. He aims to show "how humans and nonhumans, provided that they are no longer in a situation of civil war, can *exchange properties*"⁹ and build a politics of collectivity. Yet Morton and Latour also have divergent views both in their creative response to ecological collapse and their ways of seeing life and matter.

When Morton thinks about life and the human, he draws heavily on Charles Darwin to describe an uncertain, open process of interdependence and coexistence with other beings. Humans, consisting of nonhuman things like bacteria and DNA (itself defined by viral infections) are in a constant mesh of unpredictable evolution. When Morton tries to understand matter, he draws on Gilles Deleuze who in turn describes Leibniz's idea of " 'the totality of the Universe resembling a 'pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves' " "¹⁰. When I dig a pond and watch what happens to the things that inhabit it, the changing water levels, the creatures moving around in three dimensions and birds taking a bath, and when the frogs lay spawn which develop into tadpoles that grow legs and move between the hydrosphere and the atmosphere, I think of Darwin's evolution in high speed and the pond as a Universe enmeshed with an infinite number of other Universes.

⁸ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Trans. Catherine Porter, (London: Harvard University Press, 2004)

⁹ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p.61.

¹⁰ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge Mass and London, Harvard University Press, 2010), p.55 quoting Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tim Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p.5.

Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT)¹¹, in contrast to the entwined mesh of Morton, sees entities as distinct but connected. For Latour, it is the exchanges between actors, both human and other than human that allow for a possible escape from ecological crisis through the generation of associations. The actor here refers, not to a stage or screen performer but to any entity that "modifies another entity ... their competence is deduced from their performances."¹² Again, Latour is not referring to performances on stage or screen but to the actions and reactions of the human and nonhuman; the bringing into being of action through time. However, he clearly sees the theatre as a place that can facilitate an emotional engagement with the ecological crisis. After several decades of thinking about what to do, Latour chose the theatre as a place to do thinking.

The sense of powerlessness we feel in the face of ecological crisis, Latour argues, stems from the disconnection between the scale of the problem and the set of emotions, habits of thought and feelings that are necessary to attend to the crisis.¹³ For Latour, scientists can provide data and theatre can provide the local scale that allows for the interrogation of our emotional relationship to Earth. I will return to Latour's theatrical enterprise shortly. I wish to introduce now a further understanding of ecology that finds middle ground between the object orientation of Morton's mesh and the political science of Latour's network. The 'meshwork' of social anthropologist, Tim Ingold, understands the mesh of human and nonhuman lifelines as a function of the activities, movements and flows of those entities.¹⁴

Ingold examines ecology from the 'dwelling perspective' through the tasks, labours and processes or 'skills' involved in the construction of dwellings, the cultivation of land and cultural practice.¹⁵ He does not see the human as immersed *in* an environment but rather an active, living part of the meshwork. For Ingold, the lifelines of living beings are entwined in constantly emerging and degenerating knots that make it impossible to fully distinguish between the human and the other than human things that we share the planet with. From Ingold's anthropological perspective, the mesh is a function of human labour or work. Morton's object orientation is thus augmented by Ingold with an explicit call for human

¹¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

¹² Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p.237

¹³ Bruno Latour, *Waiting for Gaia. Composing the world through arts and politics*. Transcribed Lecture at French Institute, London, November 2011. Downloaded as a PDF from http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_0.pdf Accessed, July 29, 2013 p. 2.

¹⁴ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013). pp. 132 – 136.

¹⁵ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of The Environment, Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2000) p.5.

action and *practice* as a research methodology. As I will show below, Morton does not reject human activity, construction or practice as research and indeed his call for artistic and creative practice chimes in important ways with my own experiments. Yet I cannot embrace a full orientation towards the nonhuman as a way of being and thinking. I prefer to think of my ontological position during these experiments as being in an asymmetrical dance in which humans, trees, spades, pathways, earth and water intermittently take the lead in what Ingold calls a 'dance of agency'.¹⁶

Ingold makes a case for practice as a form of knowledge generation in anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture and it is easy enough to translate his thinking into my performance practice because his enquiries into the ways that humans live and might live involve the performance of tasks or actions; weaving a basket, building a dry stone wall or digging through a container of earth with bare hands for example.¹⁷ Ingold claims that knowledge is gained by seeing, listening, feeling, doing and making as a 'participant observer' in the dance of agency. This is the mode of being that describes my own position during the practical experiments that are critiqued in this thesis.

Ingold coins the term 'taskscape' as an alternative to 'landscape' to highlight the way that meanings, signs and feelings in our daily lives arise out of the experience of tasks we carry out through a place. Likewise, cultural practice for Ingold is situated for the practitioner "... in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings".¹⁸ The labour of digging in fields, gardens, city allotments, building sites, graveyards, beaches and mines is an activity that particularly resonates with Ingold's taskscape in the sense that it requires sustained, iterative physical activity and associated rhythmic patterns 'within' the taskscape to achieve projected ends. Before a home can be built foundation trenches are dug, before potatoes are planted the soil is dug along with irrigation ditches. Ultimately at our final dwelling place, if we are buried, a hole is first dug. In the case of my performance experiments, before a pond can be constructed or before a tree can be planted, earth is dug. Digging projects landscape emergence into the future. It exists in the present as an emerging relationship with the future with resonances in the past.

I have attempted to show how digging might be seen as a defining task of dwelling in the taskscape. The liminal space of a tidal beach is one of the few places where we can freely experience and interact with ecology. There are relatively few constraints on my

¹⁶ Ingold, *Making*, p. 100.

¹⁷ Ingold, *Making*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸ Ingold, *Perception of The Environment*, p. 5.

activities (the tides, weather and the limitations of an infant body) compared with the regulations and rules that determine behaviour in the city. However, when there *is* digging in the city, the transactions between earth, air and water that are brought into view are part of a wider narrative concerning the ways that land is owned and used and the ways that our ecologies have been transformed by the economic 'rules of the house' that determine who can dig where. One might add that a city pond is also a liminal space where changing water levels, seasonal fluctuations in fauna and flora and human interactions encourage a taskscape of constantly emerging ecological patterns that rub up against the economies of dwelling in the city.

Digging and Doing Economics

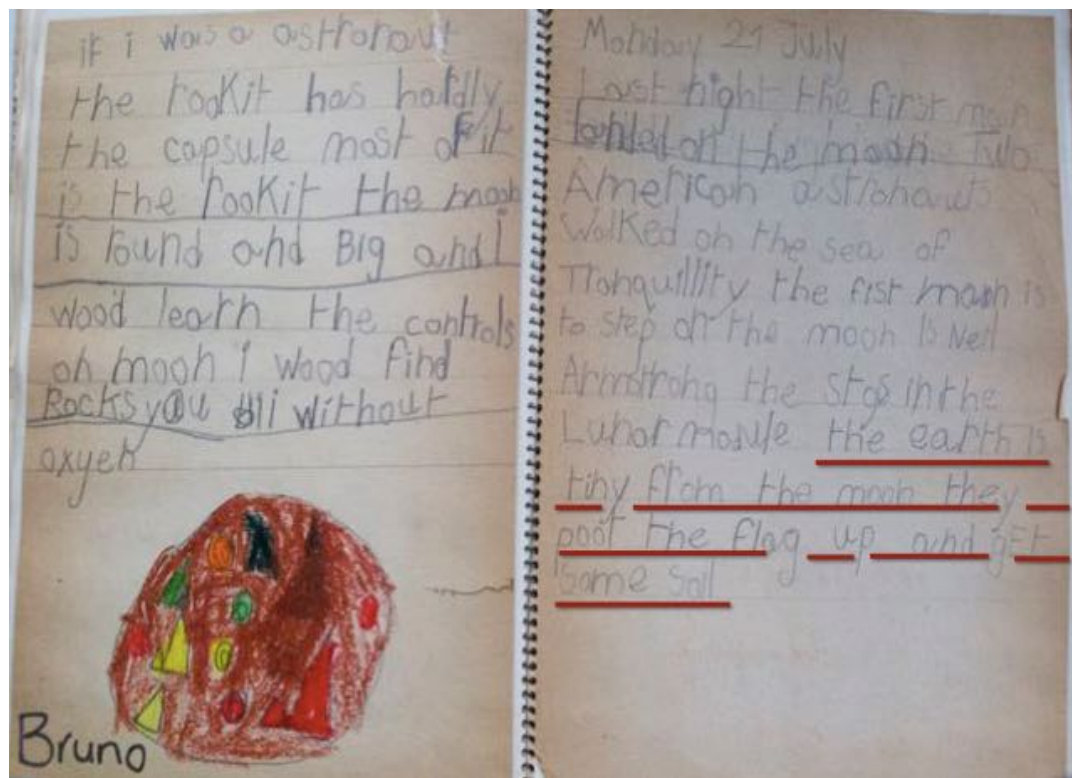


Figure 0.02. (Above) Illustrated essay by the author 21 July 1969. Underlined: "The earth is tiny from the moon they poot the flag up and get some soil."

On the beach the labour of digging is not motivated by the desire to earn a wage or produce anything of monetary value. In terms of economics, digging on a public beach costs nothing more than human energy and is a waste of time since the forms produced by my labour were soon to be washed away by the next high tide. In contrast it cost billions of

dollars to put a digger on the moon and to stake a claim on new territory in the hope of profiting for centuries to come from any minerals that might be revealed by the digger. At the age of six I learned about the ideas of a finite planet, American expansionism and about digging into the surface of the moon when on 29th July 1969 I wrote at school (Figure 0.2):

Last night the first man landed on the moon Two American astronauts Walked on the sea of Tranquillity ... the earth is tiny from the moon they poot the flag up and gEt Some Soil¹⁹

Neil Armstrong's first task after setting foot on the moon and walking a few steps was to dig into the surface and collect a small quantity of material from the moon's lithosphere. There was concern that the mission to collect larger quantities of material may have to be abandoned in the event of an emergency and it was better to leave with a smaller sample than nothing at all. For NASA, the digging up of material and geological analysis was, along with walking and flag erecting, a crucial part of each Apollo moon landing. So much so that for the final moon landing of Apollo 17 in December 1972 a geologist, Harrison Schmitt was selected to join the crew as the only professional scientist to walk on the moon.²⁰ His most important task was to collect samples by digging into the surfaces he encountered. In Schmitt's mind, the colonisation of the moon was about digging up minerals, profit and the accumulation of capital. In 2006 he wrote a scathing attack on NASA and called for the re-colonisation of the moon and its settlement and development by privately owned corporations.

History clearly shows that a system of internationally sanctioned private property ... would encourage lunar settlement and development far more than the establishment of a lunar "commons," ... Systems encompassing the recognition of private property have provided far more benefit to the world than those that attempt to manage common ownership.²¹

Schmitt, the geologist who dug on the moon before a TV audience of millions is promoting the economic agenda that I argue has resulted in the privatisation of land and geology for the benefit of a few and an ecological crisis that harms us all. The human capacity to dig in a place is a function of our desire to explore our hidden geologies and to improve our places

¹⁹ Bruno Roubicek, *Last Night the First Man Landed on the Moon*, School Essay, (Richmond upon Thames, Petersham Russell School, 1969). p. 2.

²⁰ See Harrison Schmitt, *Return to the Moon, Exploration, Enterprise and Energy in the Human Settlement of Space*, (New York: Praxis Publishing, 2006).

²¹ Schmitt, *Return to the Moon*, p. 8.

of dwelling with better food, better housing, improved water supply and so on but the capacity to dig is dependant on the political and economic status of the digger and the digger's economic relationship with the land on which they dwell.

Refugees from conflicts and economic migrants whose political and economic lives have collapsed or are at best precarious, are denied the opportunity to dig but are confronted instead by the deep foundations of walls and fences that keep them from crossing political boundaries.²² Cities of tents at border crossings evidence the fact that the economically disenfranchised cannot dig foundations for their shelters. The children of refugees crossing the Mediterranean are perhaps more likely to be found dead on a beach than playing in the sand. Digging is the preserve of those who have access to land and nowhere is that more apparent than in urban areas where economic activity and competition for a place to dwell are intensified.

To think of the city as a homogeneous mass of people is a mistake. Every city has wealthier areas where property owners can afford to dig up their basements or outdoor areas and extend their dwelling down into the earth or into their garden. Every city has poorer areas where residents live in high density housing with no outdoor space and no basement. Many millions live in shantytowns constructed without permission where digging for foundations is denied and rudimentary shelters are flimsily constructed from cheap materials. Others have no dwelling place of their own and must find shelter under bridges or in doorways or in Albion Millennium Green (AMG), where my early digging experiments occurred (chapters one and two) and where several homeless individuals have dwelled, sometimes for weeks on end.

AMG is a small public park that is permanently open to humans and nonhumans alike. It is a rare example of land in the city that has been returned to free public access after about 200 years of restricted access and private ownership. Before the early 19th century, the area now enclosed as AMG was a marshy area of the much larger Sydenham Common where, like other areas of common land in Britain, the poor and landless could practice agriculture and celebrate annual festivities. The journey of this plot of land, about the size of a football pitch, from common land in an agricultural area southeast of London, to a public space in a busy part of the city offers a complex narrative (summarised here) that illuminates the political economies that determine how land in the city is owned, fenced in, dwelled through and encroached upon. When land use is contested, as in the 200-year battle for control over Sydenham Common, digging often becomes a defining

²² See Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, (Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books, 2010).

activity of those who wish to assert ownership and control over that land and a defining activity of those who wish to resist enclosure.

The illustrations below show how Sydenham Common in the 18th century existed in a rural area, southeast of London, and the position of Albion Millennium Green. (Figure 0.3)



Figure 0.03

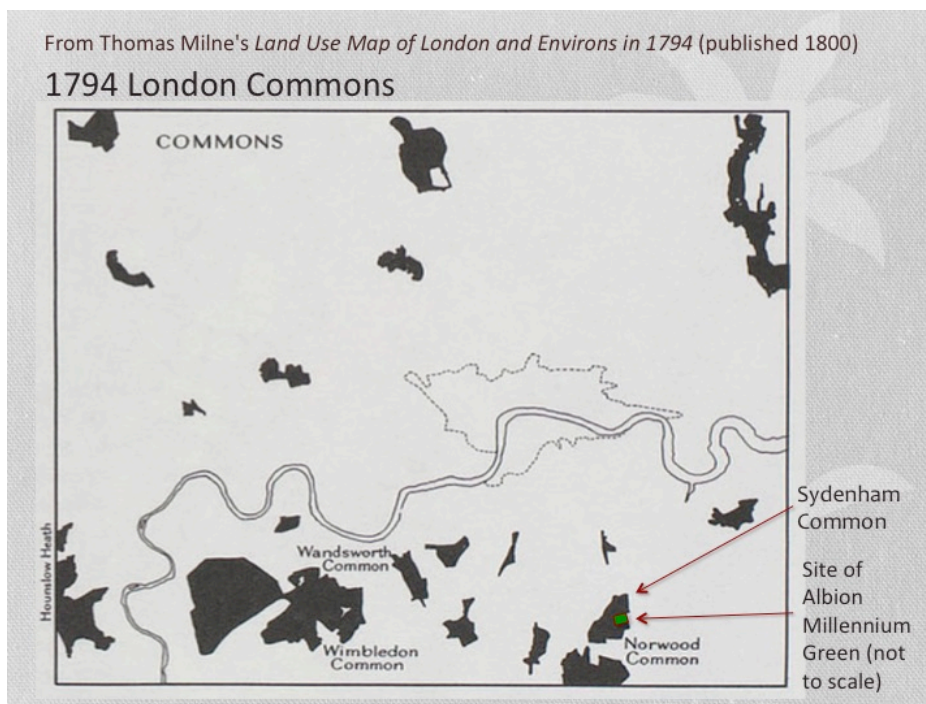


Figure 0.04

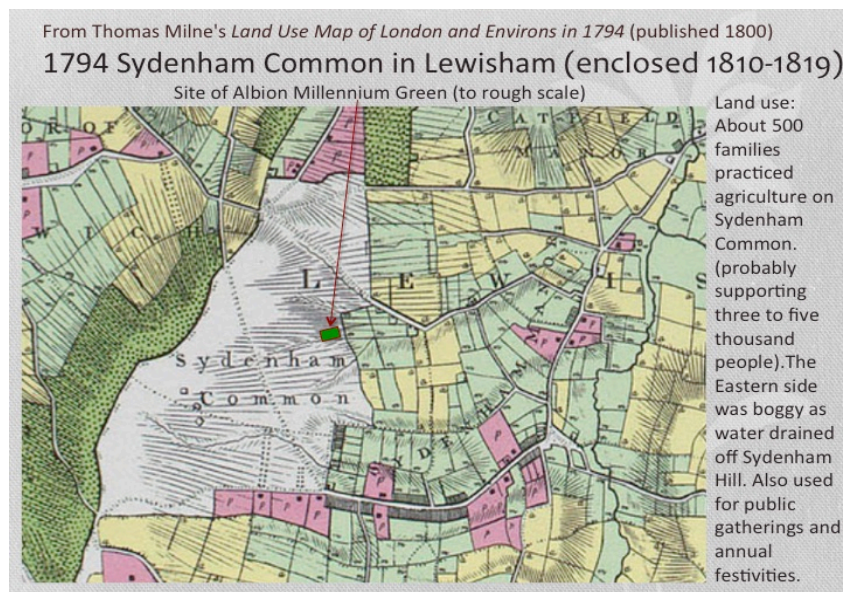


Figure 0.05

A common way of establishing newly enclosed land by those wishing to develop it was draining the land by digging ditches that established boundaries and, along with fences and hedges, prevented access for public grazing.²³ Local Squire and Yeoman of the Kings Guard, Henry Newport first attempted the enclosure of parts of Sydenham Common in the name of 'improvement' in 1605²⁴. Other local gentry encouraged enclosure to suppress the annual fair that occurred on the land.²⁵

Like many similar fairs in London, these gatherings were often rowdy and local landowners were keen to discourage the 'lowlife' they attracted. The attempted enclosure of Sydenham Common, therefore, was not simply an effort to increase the profitability of the land but also to control access and use.²⁶ It has not been possible to find any visual or written description of the Sydenham Common festivities. We might assume, if they are in any way close to the music festivals people enjoy today, they involved public performance, dance, sex, alcohol (there were many pear orchards in the area) and any other stimulants that were popular.²⁷ The free music festivals of the sixties and seventies in Europe and the US and the annual Solstice festival that still occurs at Stonehenge in the UK have existed according to a different economy than the society through which they move and might give us a clue as to how festivities on Sydenham Common operated. When I began my labours on AMG I had no idea of its history as a part of the commons. As its former life emerged, and as I watched visitors exploring the site during *The Little Ecological Arts Festival* (chapter two), so did a thought of the festivities that occurred on the site until it was enclosed.

²³ O'Connor, *Rights of Common*, The Fight Against the Theft of Sydenham Common and One Tree Hill, (PastTense: London, 2009) p. 4.

²⁴ O'Connor, *Rights of Common*, ibid.

²⁵ O'Connor, *Rights of Common* p.10.

²⁶ O'Connor, *Rights of Common* p.10.

²⁷ From personal experience, I can attest to the presence of psychedelic fungi in South London's grassland and open spaces.

Various attempts to enclose Sydenham Common were resisted through the courts and by direct, sometimes violent action by the families who dwelled on it. Some local tradesman and land owners who had economic interests in the common land argued against enclosure as did local religious leaders and some nobility who feared “the prospect of destitute squatters evicted from the Common becoming a burden on the ratepayers of the parish.”²⁸ In Betty O’Connor’s history of the enclosure of Sydenham Common, quotes from reports of the Commons Preservation Society illustrate my point that digging became a defining action of the enclosure and privatisation of common land.

Presently the patentees began to make ditches about the common and inclosed it and drave out and killed sundry of the cattell of the inhabitants²⁹

Sydenham Common supported around 500 poor households that “would be utterly undone”³⁰ by the loss of access to the land and anti-enclosure movements such as The Levellers and The Diggers resisted enclosure by ripping down fences, levelling hedges, and filling in the ditches before collectively cultivating their own crops.³¹ The Diggers acquired their name, not only by cultivating land threatened with enclosure but also by filling-in or ‘un-digging’ the ditches that had been dug by landowners to drain marshland and establish boundaries. As O’Connor notes, “some of the more unruly residents of Sydenham had taken up direct action – tearing down the fences and filling in Henry Newport’s ditches”.³² After many decades of confrontation, violence and litigation, pressure to enclose Sydenham Common reached a height about the same time that the London to Croydon canal was being planned to run through the Eastern edge of Sydenham Common.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, just before the railways arrived, canals represented the height of industrial development. The opening of the Croydon Canal (23 October 1809) was marked by *The Times* with a poem celebrating its potential to generate commerce, trade and wealth:

And may it long flourish, while commerce caressing,
Adorns its gay banks with her wealth bringing stores,
To Croydon, and all round the country a blessing,
May industry’s sons ever thrive on its shores!
Long down the fair stream may the rich vessel glide,
And the Croydon Canal be of England the pride.³³

²⁸ O’Connor, *Rights of Common* p.8.

²⁹ O’Connor, *Rights of Common*, p. 5.

³⁰ O’Connor, *Rights of Common*, p. 4.

³¹ See Anon., *Down With the Fences, Battles for the Commons in South London*, (Past Tense Publications, London, 2004)

³² O’Connor, *Rights of Common*, p. 6.

³³ “Croydon Canal”, *The Times*, 27 October 1809. From Steve Grindlay: *Slide Show of The Croydon Canal* <https://www.slideshare.net/foresthill/croydon-canal-talk> Downloaded 16 August 2017.

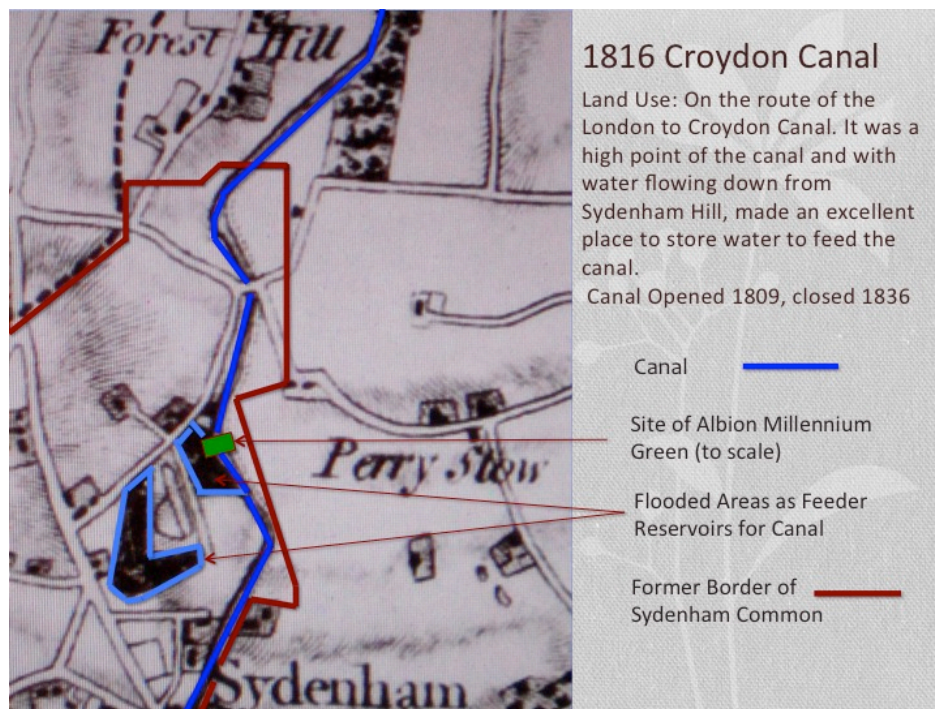


Figure 0.06

The geography of the site now occupied by AMG, at roughly the same altitude to areas directly to the North and South, made it perfect for the route of the canal. At the highest altitude on the nine-mile length of the canal from Deptford to Croydon and with plentiful water running down Sydenham Common from Sydenham Hill, it made the ideal site for a thirty-acre reservoir, more a lake than a pond, to feed the canal. The privately owned canal built by ‘industry’s sons’ and perhaps dug for a wage by local peasants ran through the commons, and heralded the rapid transformation of Sydenham Common into land run according to the economy of private ownership.

Soon after the canal opened, an Act of Parliament of 1810 formally gave permission for Sydenham Common to be ‘parcelled’ into plots of land and distributed largely to the church, Crown and property owning elites of Lewisham.³⁴ The Croydon canal was never economically profitable because of the large number of locks required to raise barges from Deptford to Forest Hill and investors lost most of their money. The reservoir was drained and the land parcelled into plots.

³⁴ Anon., *Down With the Fences, Battles for the Commons in South London*, (Past Tense Publications, London, 2004) p.6.

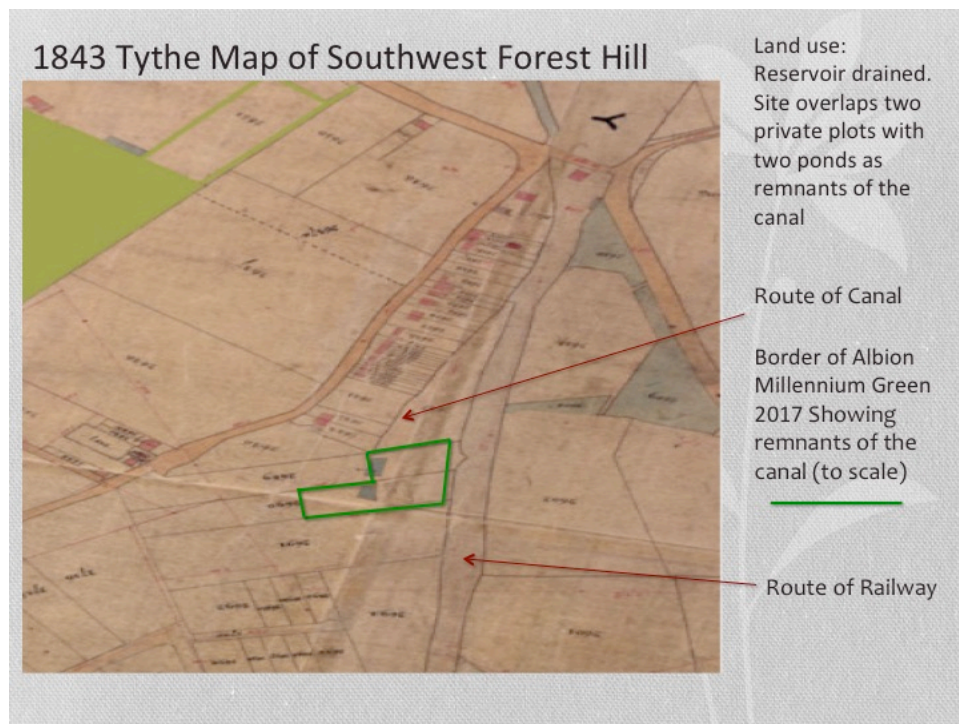


Figure 0.07

In rural areas, the enclosure of common agricultural land in the name of improving its productivity resulted, as Simon Farlie notes in his history of enclosure,³⁵ in an increase in profits and wealth for the landowners but often a decrease in the productivity of the land. Yet here, with London expanding rapidly, and with the arrival of the railway, agricultural practice and festivities on Sydenham Common were rapidly (in geological terms) replaced by a suburban landscape of shops, pubs, private houses, a swimming pool, library, 'Girls Industrial Home', a railway station, museum, roads, schools and a few small fields of allotments so former occupants of the common could grow vegetables. Many of the allotments have been built over and AMG remains one of the few open green areas of the original Common. Nevertheless, during the course of this research project, the land has been subject to huge pressures from surrounding developments. One new enclosure by a private developer (see below) has removed a small area of AMG from the public realm forever.

The site of AMG was largely saved from development, perhaps because, having spent decades under water, it was waterlogged. It became a small farm with an orchard and pond left over from the canal.

³⁵ Simon Farlie, *A Short History of Enclosure in Britain*, The Land, Issue 7, Summer 2009. Accessed online, 5th July 2015; <http://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/short-history-enclosure-britain>

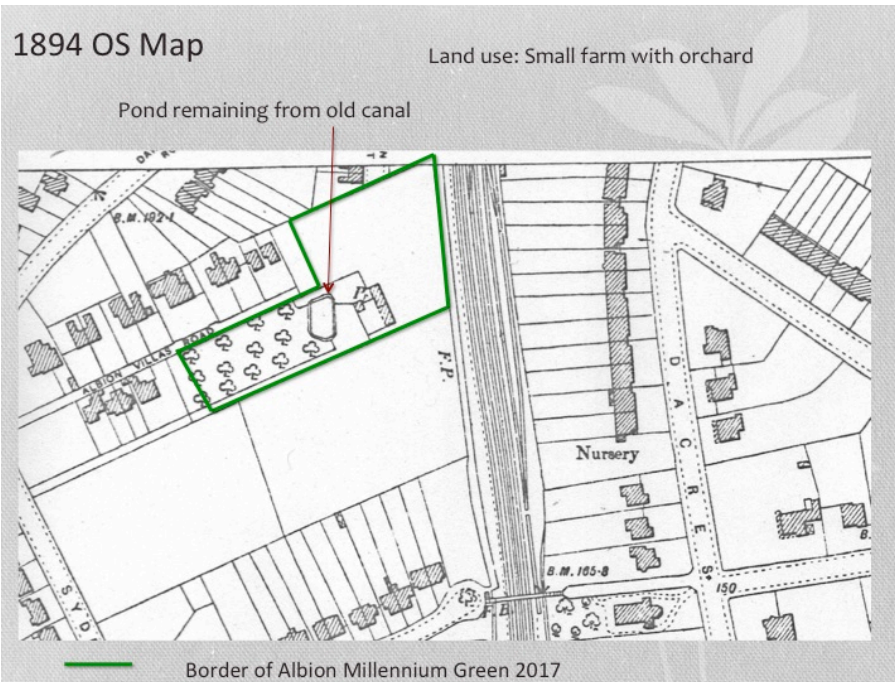


Figure 0.08

Around 1900, the land was purchased by Sydenham Tennis Club, another move that discouraged the construction of dwellings on the site. A pavilion for showers and changing rooms was constructed. It remained a tennis club until 1985 when the club moved to a larger site. The remnants of the tennis club: high mesh fences to prevent balls escaping, and posts that supported nets are still visible around the site.

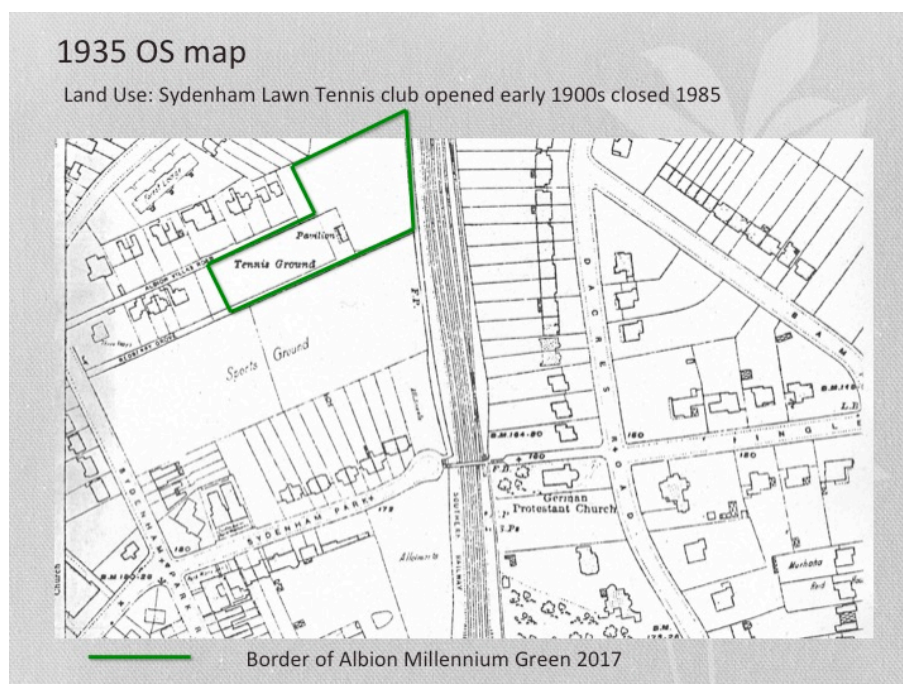


Figure 0.09

With the end of the tennis club, and while the club tried to sell the site, wildlife quickly re-established itself. Silver Birch trees, that probably had lain dormant since the site was part of the commons, pushed up through the tarmac of the hard tennis courts. Grasses, shrubs, wildflowers and bramble gradually encroached over the courts bringing foxes, birds, insects and countless other things. Evidence revealed when I helped clear rubbish from the site in 2007 showed that during this 'in-between uses' period, (1985 – 2000) the site was also used by prostitutes, drug users, the homeless and thieves who had emptied and dumped stolen handbags in the undergrowth. It became a place where humans and nonhumans coexisted outside the economic rules that dominated life in the surrounding urban taskscape.

Sometime between 1985 and 2000, one neighbour, whose house bordered the tennis courts, purchased the adjoining land and expanded his garden into what became The Green with the construction of a 1.75 meter-high brick wall about 20 metres long that effectively tripled the size of his private garden and reduced the size of the former tennis club. The remaining land was sold to a developer.

Plans by the developer to build about twelve houses on the site were resisted by local residents, largely on the grounds that road access to the site was insufficient to support increased traffic. The residents succeeded in persuading the local council that the housing development was inappropriate and that it could instead provide a valuable wildlife and community resource. Albion Millennium Green was established in 2000 as part of a campaign by the Millennium Commission (now the Big Lottery Fund) to celebrate the new millennium. The campaign established 245 Greens across England intended as permanent "breathing spaces" for everyone. Like Albion Millennium Green, most of the new greens were leased or owned by charitable trusts responsible for the day-to-day management of the sites. The trusts are currently overseen by Natural England (called The Countryside Commission in 2000); the government's official advisor on the natural environment whose remit is "to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive."³⁶ One could argue that the area was already achieving this without stewardship but The Albion Millennium Green Trust, (The Trust), was formed by seven local residents including a representative of The London Borough of Lewisham, (LBL).³⁷

³⁶ Natural England website: Accessed, 17th June, 2014.

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about_us/whatwedo/default.aspx

³⁷ According to a copy of the original Deeds agreed between The London Borough of Lewisham and Trustees of AMG Trust, 31st March 2000. A Lease of 35 years was granted to The Trust by LBL and the land was purchased from a private developer with a grant of £124,300 from LBL and match funding from the Millennium Commission, with £24,300 being kept in reserve for developing the site. p.1.

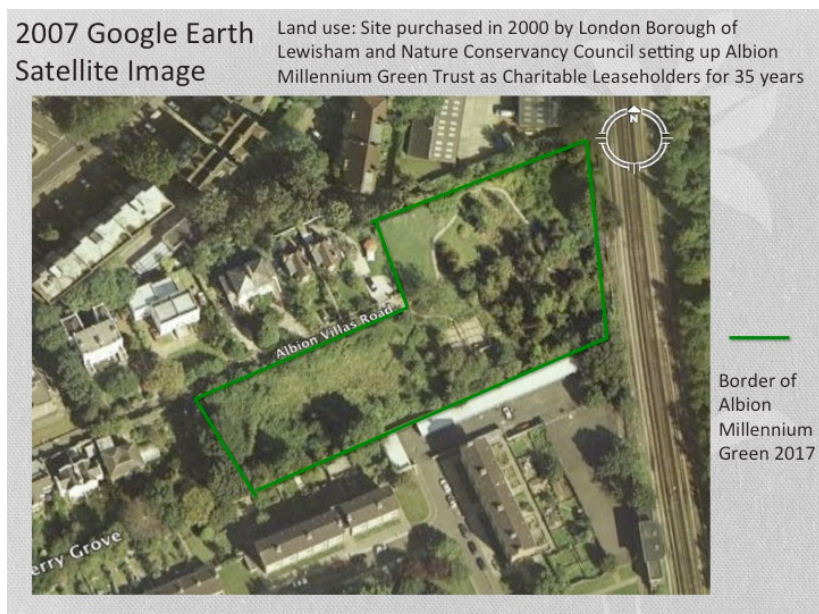


Figure 0.10

The land thus underwent a change from private ownership to ownership by a trust whose aims are to provide a breathing space for the “whole community” and encourage “shared enjoyment of the whole of the land.”³⁸ This shift from private towards public marked an important moment in the history of the ownership of an area of land that had, for many generations, been subjected to contentious disputes over control, ownership and use.

A neighbour directly to the West of AMG built a five bedroom detached house in his private garden just outside the border of The Green between 2010 and 2012. The hedge that previously separated the private garden from AMG was removed and a new fence was constructed in 2012, two meters high and 25 metres long, *inside* The Green, thereby increasing the size of the private development and decreasing the size of AMG by around ten square meters. Despite lengthy negotiations with the developer and Lewisham Council’s planning department, the only way to stop this incursion into AMG would have been expensive legal action that was beyond the financial resources of The Trust (the developer also happened to be a lawyer with access to the full power of the judicial system).

³⁸ Schedule 2, Trust Deed agreed between LBL and Trustees of AMG Trust, 31st March 2000. p. 2.

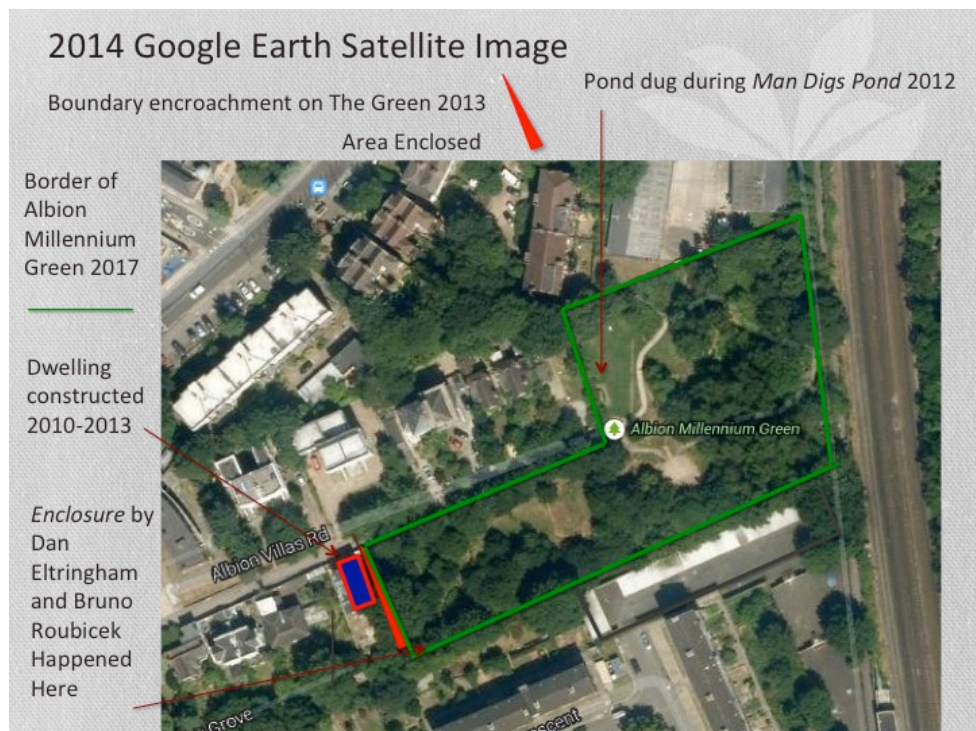


Figure 0.11

These relatively recent private enclosures of what is a public space reflect some of the processes and pressures that the space experienced when enclosure began in 1605. With AMG in the hands of a charitable trust the land was made available for all members of the community to use at any time. However, disputes over who controls the land, its boundaries, how it is used and by whom, are still matters of contention that are highlighted by the dialogues and correspondence that occurred on The Green itself and behind the scenes during the preparation and execution of my performance experiments. The performed action of digging during *Man Digs Pond*, while intended as a celebration of The Green as a community and wildlife resource, was received by some as the economic exploitation of a public resource for private gain by myself as a representative of the property owning middle classes. Since I was digging what was effectively a ditch to be filled with water and fenced, my action could easily be associated with the enclosure of land by elites, rather than the celebration and development of a community and wildlife resource. This tension between public and private generates many contrasting affects that are returned to throughout this thesis.

I have shown in the above paragraphs how, In urban areas like London, the process of removing the poor from common land, enclosure and industrialisation did not mean the end of digging as an everyday task of dwelling but instead of digging the soil to plant crops,

to weed, irrigate or turn the earth, at least some of the families removed from the land became waged labourers, perhaps digging foundation or drainage trenches for private dwellings to house the rising middle class urban population, or digging the holes for the public baths, Forest Hill Pools, that opened in 1885, or the route for the Croydon Canal and the London to Brighton Railway (opened 1841).

I am grateful to local historian, Steve Grindlay, for uncovering some of the maps and information used above. Poet and fellow research student (now Doctor) Dan Eltringham revealed the battles over use of Sydenham Common during a performance installation in AMG entitled *Enclosure* as a contribution to *LEAF (Little Ecological Arts Festival* chapter two) during the first year of my research at Birkbeck.³⁹

I encouraged Dan's contribution in response to the battle waged with the neighbour over the boundary of Albion Millennium Green. He had built a high fence inside AMG to enclose his garden and after the house was sold, the new owner erected signs facing the inside of the green warning visitors that their identities and actions were being 'recorded'.



Figure 0.12

Enclosure. Part of Albion Millennium Green is lost forever behind a high fence. Photo: The Author, August 2017.

³⁹ *Enclosure* Performance Installation by Dan Eltringham and Bruno Roubicek including written text, *In Little Parcels* by Dan Eltringham presented at *Little Ecological Arts Festival*, 1-4 May 2013 Albion Millennium Green, Lewisham London. See Appendix 2 for text. For photographic documentation of *Enclosure* and text, *In Little Parcels*, see: <http://littleecologicalart.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/enclosure-by-dan-eltringham-conceived.html>

Eltringham's *Enclosure* took place in AMG next to the high fence. He built his own fence around this quiet border area out of rope supplied by me (recycled from fly towers, with thanks to Theatre Royal Stratford East). He erected signs such as "Private Property" and "Keep Out" and ambiguously: "Come in and make yourself at home" and "I could sell you a third". He sat at a table and chair, read a book, drank coffee and occasionally 'used' a vacuum cleaner that stood next to the table. On a tree stump, Dan placed a pile of pages on which was printed his written contribution, *In Little Parcels*, a poetic rendering of the story of Sydenham Common's enclosure (see Appendix 2 for full text). The scarcity of information regarding the uses of the Common before it was enclosed is represented in Eltringham's text by spaces and gaps. His contribution to *LEAF* helped to fill some gaps in my knowledge of this little parcel of land.

I have focussed above on the processes of enclosure experienced by the residents of Sydenham Common and the land now occupied by Albion Millennium Green in London and the thesis will outline the importance of the site as a public stage for my practical research. There are many different cities and ways of dwelling and many different stories to tell about digging. This thesis is interested in the narratives and experiences that emerge when earth is dug for fun, to plant trees, grow food, create wildlife ponds and restore pathways in the cities of London, New York, Reims, Milan and Pittsburgh. These cities have their own rules and structures that vary according to the economic constituency of the local area. It is easier for me to dig in a poorer suburb of London like LBL than it is in central London, where the high value of land has encouraged tighter regulation. All three case studies engage with the economic conditions existing in the place they choose to dig but they do it in a way that reflects their divergent political concerns and their differing attitude to the relationship between the performer and the audience.

When earth is dug on a vacant lot in Pittsburgh by TLT (*Turning The Earth*, 1975) described in chapter one it is a symbolic act of liberation: a re-claiming of land for the common good. In the words of TLT director Julian Beck there is the potential to negotiate the ways "we can reclaim the earth for the community's benefit".⁴⁰ When Kaprow digs earth (*Trading Dirt*, 1982 -1986 chapter two) he ascribes the earth a kind of social value that is negotiated when he exchanges it from another site. When Agnes Denes (chapter

⁴⁰ Julian Beck, Judith Malina, "TLT Collective", Leroy House, Bob Massengale, Mary Mary, Tom Walker, Eduardo Silva, Jon Schultz, Jezreel, Pamela Badyk, Hanon Reznikov, Fanette, Carlo Altomare, Chris Torch, Isha Manna Beck and Carol Westernik, "Turning the Earth: A Ceremony for Spring Planting in Five Ritual Acts: Collective Creation of TLT", *The Drama Review: TDR*, 19 [3], Expressionism Issue (Sep., 1975), p. 105.

three) digs furrows through landfill beneath The Twin Towers of The World Trade Centre, (*Wheatfield - a Confrontation*, 1982) or designs methane digesting ponds for landfill sites (*Rising Pink Clouds*, conceived in 1978) there is a focus on the ecologies of a place and a desire to heal what is broken and there is a confrontation with the economic conditions of a site. My performances are not revolutions. Rather they are speculations about the ways that the performance of digging can embody a different way of living together with our geologies and our ecologies.

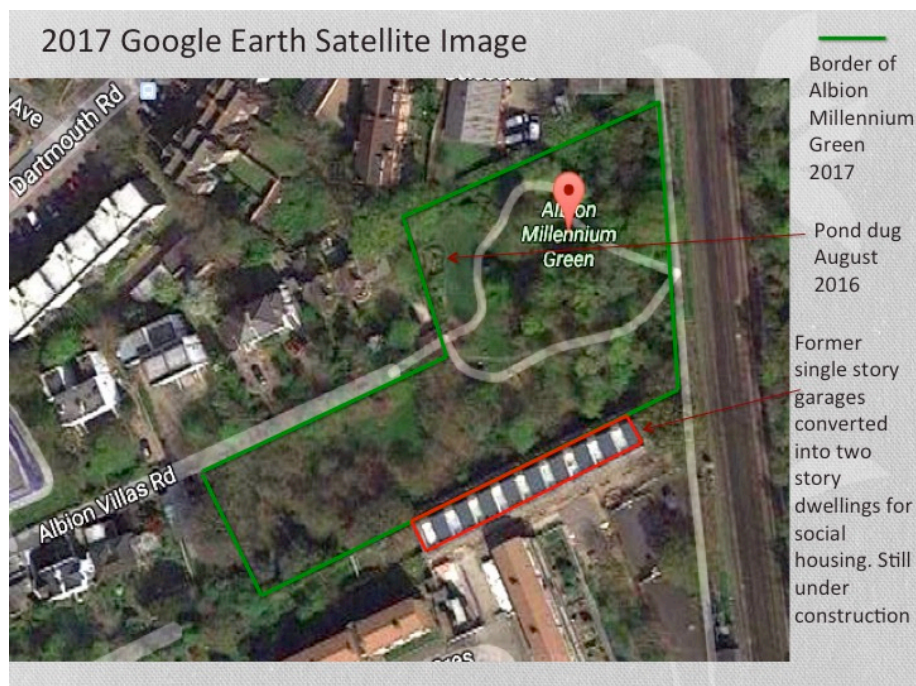


Figure 0.13

The words economics and ecology share the same prefix 'eco-' meaning house, dwelling or habitation. The suffix '-nomics' is related to *nomisma*: ancient Greek for 'money' from *nomos*, meaning 'law', 'rule' or 'custom'. Economics therefore is the social science that seeks to describe the 'rules of the house' that determine who has control over land and the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Economists measure, theorise and observe these rules, laws or customs but they can also be understood through their experience in the everyday processes of life or the experiences at play during a constructed performance event involving digging. In this thesis economic theory concerning labour and digging is distilled through the thinking of Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes and informs my practical experiments. Dwelling is what we do when we 'spend time' with a place or a thought. Here dwelling is considered as the duration of human activity through the taskscape and a function of both ecology and economics.

Communities of Performer and Audience

When an audience witnesses a deliberately constructed and considered performance of digging there are new rules woven through the ecologies and economies of a place. In this section, I introduce the methodological choices I have made in terms of the performance techniques, 'rules of the house' and material structures that constitute my experiments. In chapter two, I borrow Michael Kirby's idea of the performance matrix as a way of understanding and gauging the constructions of character, time and place that constitute a theatre performance in relation to both my own research and Kaprow's experiments with *non*-theatrical performance and the everyday. Throughout the thesis my own choices are viewed through the lens of other artists who have performed the task of digging while others watched. In each case, the task is performed with differing degrees and types of performance matrix but the crucial distinction between each approach can be identified in the relationship established between artist and audience during the preparation, execution or aftermath of the performance.

The stylistic and formal choices I have made in the development of my performance practice are founded in my experiences as a professional theatre performer since 1987 and as an audience member from the age of four, and more specifically since seeing a Forced Entertainment performance, *Hidden J* in 1994 at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in central London. This production radically altered my understanding of what theatre could and should be. The actors did not address each other but looked at and spoke to the audience. They did not seem to be playing fully matrixed characters enacting a linear narrative but rather presented a version of their regular, or non-matrixed 'off-stage' personae in a series of disconnected, strange, disturbing, funny, ridiculous, dreamlike situations that seemed neither carefully rehearsed nor completely improvised. There was a sense that the performers had met in the pub the night before and written an outline of the show on a beer mat but as the show unfolded it had become clear that they had approached that outline from divergent perspectives. They were each trying to tell the story of the show in their own way. Stories were unfinished, monologues interrupted and actions left unexplained.

The style was rough, bold and brash. They utilized formal scenographic conventions of theatrical performance in terms of lighting, sound, costume and scenery but the relationship between audience and performer was unlike any that I had experienced in a

theatre performance. I clearly remember the sense, as I sat in my seat watching performers on the stage, that I was witnessing my own stories; my hopes, dreams, fears, desires, anxieties and potentialities being played out. I wondered if the other audience members were feeling the same sense that the show was about their lives. How could that be possible? How could a theatre performance be about my life and at the same time the lives of the other people in the room? It is only since working with the company intermittently for fifteen years and my research at Birkbeck that I have understood how a performance is able to make space for the audience's own, heterogeneous stories to become entwined with the action on stage.

Audience

I remain grateful to my friend Jerry Killick for encouraging me to see *Hidden J*. Standing outside the venue after the show, I remember saying to him, "That's the kind of theatre I want to make." A decade later, after many twists and turns and a good deal of luck, we were both performing in a world tour of Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess* (a show that repeatedly told the story of the end of the world). *Bloody Mess* firmly established the international reputation of the company and in 2016 they became the first theatre group to be awarded the prestigious International Ibsen Award (Previous winners: 2008 Peter Brook, 2009 Ariane Mnouchkine, 2010 Jon Fosse, 2012 Heiner Goebbels, 2014 Peter Handke). The awarding committee,

... has chosen to honour this continually surprising and not least entertaining theatre group, because Forced Entertainment revive and challenge the theatre, and recognise and utilise the power inherent in the art form. Forced Entertainment take the theatre's role within society deeply seriously.⁴¹

One of the ways the company makes its performances so relevant to the society through which they move and so relevant to me as an audience member is that they refuse Kirby's performance matrices concerning the embodiment of imaginary characters or imaginary places or the passing of symbolic time. The performers operate in the same psychic, geographic and temporal world as the audience, even if they are spatially separated and

⁴¹ International Ibsen Award website, <http://www.internationalibsenaward.com/nyheter/winner-of-the-international-ibsen-award-2016> downloaded 30 May, 20117.

roles as artists and audience are distinct. When I watched *Hidden J* I felt I was watching people that were a part of my everyday world. There was no linear narrative; a beginning, middle and end but rather a sense that things unfolded or 'happened' for the time we spent in the room together. My role, as audience member was to make sense of the disturbing and hilarious dystopia I was experiencing. In that process of making sense of the failed attempts to express I made connections between the fragments of scenes I was witnessing and my own life stories.

I argue in this thesis that spaces, narrative gaps, beats, fissures and indeed 'gags' in a performance are social places and places where the ecological thought can occur because when there is failure to express from the stage there also exists a coexistence; an acknowledgement of the presence, intellect and imagination of the other. As Morton put it in his call for art that allows for the ecological thought; the artist's "raw material is the viewer's or reader's conceptual mind ... This affects all kinds of art practice including concept art and performance art, and even agriculture as performance art ... The art object as geographical text."⁴² One might describe my performance experiments as geographical texts that do not try to make the audience think or do something but rather admit to not being certain, to stupidity and failure and aim to *melt* the seers' own stories and experiences into the story being told by the artist.

In response to Forced Entertainment's winning of the Ibsen Award, Rufus Norris, current Artistic Director of the UK's Royal National Theatre described his experience of watching a Forced Entertainment performance. "In its essence it's about failure at first. And then from that arises a kind of glorious poetry of humanity, and truth."⁴³ My point is that ecological thought *can* occur in a theatre but I have chosen to perform outside of the theatre because my digging practice arose from experiments in non-theatre locations and I'm interested in how audiences respond when the economies of an everyday urban location rub up against the economies of a performance presentation. In these situations, the audience is not necessarily seated and is certainly not in a theatre auditorium and the practitioners and scholars I examine in this thesis use a variety of terms to describe the people who spend time with a person who is digging.

'Audience' suggests a group of people who sit in an auditorium and hear the performance while 'spectator', 'viewer' or 'seer' suggest a visual experience. I would argue that seeing and hearing are both experiential activities that can have physical and

⁴² Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p.184.

⁴³ Video produced by International Ibsen Award, *Forced Entertainment*, Downloaded 25 August 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJGm8hDhCdo>

emotional affects on the witness who is translating the performance into their own experience of dwelling. TLT tend to use the word 'audience' because they emerged from a theatre culture that habitually uses the word to describe those who attend a theatre performance. Agnes Denes uses 'Manhattanites' to describe the many thousands of people who might have seen her digging through landfill in New York City. 'Participant' suggests a direct physical engagement in the action, though again it would be a mistake to suggest that a theatre audience that sees and hears the action from seats in an auditorium is not directly participating in the activity of theatre production. Participant might also include a person who does not see the show but was instrumental in its planning and preparation. 'Visitor' makes no claim on the quality of experience a person is having but suggests an active decision to temporarily cross a boundary from one place of dwelling into a place inhabited by another that operates according to the rules of a performance presentation.

Here I use whichever term seems appropriate to the case study I am focussing on. The office workers in the Twin Towers for example are 'seers' of Denes's dig in New York City (they could not hear it). When it comes to my own practice I tend towards 'visitor' because a visitor can be a participant, hearer, seer, spectator, Londoner, audience member or all the above who chooses to spend time in proximity to a person who is performing the labour of digging. For *Man Digs Pond* in London and Reims, for the *Little Ecological Arts Festival* (chapter two) and for the final practical experiment in Birkbeck's School of Arts (chapter four), there are differing degrees of participation in the activity of digging yet all visitors are free to come and go as they please and must decide how long they dwell with the event. Likewise, when a video of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims is displayed in a studio, visitors can decide how much time they spend with a partial view of a live performance that happened in another time and another place.

French theatre philosopher Antonin Artaud called on theatre performance to surround the audience and performers to the same degree and for both to feel the galvanising effects of lights, action and sound. His audience were to abandon their position as passive spectators and join the performers in the action of a 'total theatre'. Artaud has emerged as a central figure through which to theorise the practice of TLT, Kaprow and my own digging experiments. When I dug a hole for a pond during *Man Digs Pond* in 2011 the digger and visitors experienced the passenger jets passing overhead, the wind, rain and sunshine and they heard the rumble of the city to the same degree. They also heard the songs and acoustic music that visitors chose to perform during the show and I was surprised by the desire expressed by many to help with the dig. Yet in many of the

performance experiments I describe in this thesis, *Man Digs Pond* in Reims for example or Kaprow's *Trading Dirt* (both chapter two), the visitors do not dig themselves but rather see and hear the digging from a situated distance.

Jacques Rancière argues that distance between artist and spectator does not render them passive onlookers but can encourage a correspondence that allows the audience a freedom to engage with a performance in *their own way*. For Rancière, an audience's direct participation in the labour of performance can work to reinforce the authorial voice of the artist and deny the voice of the spectator. Put simply, a rehearsed performance posits the performers as knowledgeable of constructions of character, time or place and the audience as ignorant of what is to come. This is the tension that allows the audience to feel the affective states of surprise, fear, hope and relief as the action unfolds. If, however, the audience are asked to enact the story *with* the performers, they are placed from a position of un-rehearsed ignorance next to the rehearsed, knowledgeable performer. This is the ontologically unequal position that Rancière wishes to counter in his call for distance between audience and performer and the resulting 'emancipation' of the spectator.

This thesis returns to Artaud and Rancière to help me analyse degrees of participation and proximity. I ask how performances allow or deny the audience an opportunity to translate the experience into their own stories and correspond with the emerging taskscape in *their own way*. I turn now to the performer, and to the methods and constructions I employ to make a space for the ecological thought.

Performer

The publicity for both iterations of *Man Digs Pond* outlines the performer's primary intentions and what *might* happen during the show:

**A Man will move.
A Man may sing.
A Man will not speak.
A Man may cry.
A Man will not leave until A Man has dug a pond.**

The thesis will map the extent to which the things that 'will' happen actually did happen and the extent to which the things that 'may' happen actually happened. What matters here is that the reason why the man has decided to dig the pond, his motivation, is never made explicit. All the audience know is that what happens is important to the man at an

emotional level; it might make him sing and/or cry. There is irony in the idea that a person might be so powerfully affected by the construction of a stagnant pool but rather than offer a clear motivation and surrounding narrative for the dig, the show aims to draw out of the audience their own reaction and understanding and their own motivation to dig a hole and fill it with water. There is uncertainty, contingency, openness and sadness within an activity that acknowledges a reality for both the visiting humans and the other than human.

Morton requires humans to rethink their relationship with other entities and move from a hierarchical position with humans in the light at the top with their sense of superiority, language, knowledge and skill to the humiliating position of dark enmeshment that acknowledges ignorance, strangeness, weirdness, queerness and *irony* in the gap between, in my case, the digging man and the stagnant pool:

This is good news, actually, because it means I can be ecological without losing my sense of irony. Irony isn't just a slogan on a cool t-shirt; it's the way coexistence feels. Don't just do something – sit there. But in the mean time, sitting there will upgrade your version of doing and of sitting.⁴⁴

Morton's irony is not detached. Sitting, listening and reflecting is not passive. The ecological thought encounters many affective states the highest of which Morton ranks as "compassion, curiosity, humility, openness, sadness, and tenderness".⁴⁵ My practice, as described in this thesis, cannot claim to embody all these affective states all the time. There is sometimes compassion towards frogs, foxes and trees, and sometimes compassion for people. There is a curiosity about things and about different ways of thinking about and doing performance. As Morton says, in "coming closer to the actual dirt beneath our feet, the actuality of Earth"⁴⁶ there is humility. The *un-rehearsed* performances of *Man Digs Pond* are 'open' in the sense that they invite audience members to contribute to the event in their own way, and open in the sense that I was never sure what would happen or how long the pond would take to construct. One thing about digging is that you never know exactly what the spade will encounter until it makes contact with the earth. The show is not finished until the task is completed and it therefore has an uncertain duration.

The experiments described in this thesis arose after a three-year period of contemplation, dog walking, mowing grass, sitting, listening, chatting and reflection in Albion Millennium Green (AMG). This thinking became, in the words of Morton, "... a

⁴⁴ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 2010). p. 125.

⁴⁵ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁶ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp. 125.

thinking that is ecological, a contemplating that is a doing ... This is what *praxis* means – action that is thoughtful and thought that is active.”⁴⁷ The thesis traces the development of a *praxis*: using performance experiments as a platform to say something about ecology and the action of digging to think through ways of dwelling.

For Morton, with a PhD in English Literature, his creative practice is made evident in the pages of his compelling books. He refers by turns to poetry (“The inventor of the object-orientated approach was John Keats”⁴⁸), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, his favourite film; *Bladerunner* and concept rockers Pink Floyd. He likes house music and dancing and said in an interview in 2017 that having wind turbines at his home in Texas has allowed him to have a disco in every room, “with full on strobes and decks and people partaying (*sic*) for hours and hours all day every day. ... And that’s the ecological future, actually.”⁴⁹ Most humans would be unable to afford wind turbines or such opulent use of electricity but many humans can “Go out in the street and start making any and as many kinds of political affiliations with as many kinds of beings, human or otherwise, that you possibly can, with a view to creating a more non-violent and just, for everybody, ecological world.”⁵⁰ It is the affiliations generated between humans and with nonhumans during the course of my practical experiments *and* my scholarship that makes this research project a social project.

By way of a contrasting approach to an ecological performance, Bruno Latour’s theatrical enterprise, *Gaia Global Circus*⁵¹ was taking shape as I was beginning this research project and I went to the Premiere in Toulouse in September 2013 when I already knew that it would play in La Comédie de Reims while *Man Digs Pond* played in the garden of their workshop theatre (chapter two). The shows appeared simultaneously during the theatre’s *Festival Reims Scènes d'Europe*. The festival was curated by Latour and his permission was required for *Man Digs Pond*’s inclusion, so a very brief comparison here illuminates a contrast in approach that sets the tone for the contrasting methodologies that I analyse in this thesis.

In a lecture in 2011 to mark the launch of the Sciences Po, Programme of

⁴⁷ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p.181

⁴⁹ Alex Blasdel, ‘A Reckoning for Our Species. The Philosopher Prophet of the Anthropocene.’ *The Guardian* On-line, 15 June 2017, PDF Downloaded 11 July, 2017. p.7
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher>

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.13.

⁵¹ *Gaia Global Circus*, Premiere: Théâtre Daniel-Sorano, Toulouse, 28th September 2013. Concept: Bruno Latour, Frédérique Ait-Touati, Chloé Latour. Text: Pierre Daubigny. Direction: Frédérique Ait-Touati, Chloé Latour. Performance: Claire Astruc, Luigi Cerri, Jade Collinet, Matthieu Protin. Scenography: Olivier Vallet. Design and Costume: Elsa Blin. Lighting: Olivier Vallet, Benoît Aubry. Music: Laurent Sellier. Production: Gaëlle About.

Experimentation in Art and Politics, Latour declared that the continual mapping of ecological controversies and their “actants”, (both human and non-human), will offer “a more and more realistic rendering of the *theatre of the world*.”⁵² *Gaia Global Circus* was an attempt to stage those controversies using an assemblage of objects, four human actants and language that was rehearsed and refined during the devising process. *Gaia Global Circus* is rooted in the literary tradition of theatrical presentation in the sense that objects, costume and physical and vocal characterization are used by the actors to support a text that remains central to the interrogation of the controversies that are mapped during sixteen scenes. Each scene asks the audience to imagine a different geographic and temporal sphere; a TV studio, a science laboratory and the sub-marine world of the Nautilus in Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* for example. In this switching between different times, places and characters we can see the sharpest methodological difference between Latour’s approach to performance and my own. But there are deeper philosophical differences between *Gaia Global Circus* and *Man Digs Pond*. Latour sees no future after the modern but I am with Morton when he speaks of “the possibility of a postromantic, or we might say (truly) post-modern phase”⁵³

Morton put it succinctly: “it’s not enough simply to use art as a candy coating on top of facts.”⁵⁴ Latour’s creative approach to the ecological thought is confident in its authorial position. There was a sense that, rather than an exchange between audience and stage, the thinking of Latour flowed from the stage and the audience were asked to learn, listen, absorb and digest his authorial voice. The performers sometimes addressed the audience and acknowledged their presence, but the intention seemed to be educational: we, the audience, were being taught about the condition of the world and how to feel about it and encouraged to mobilise to resist ecological catastrophe. For six decades The Living Theatre (chapter one) had ambitions to educate people about the oppression they suffer and to mobilise them and overthrow the forces of capital. Interestingly *Gaia Global Circus* looks rather like some Living Theatre (TLT) productions. During Latour’s show, performers, like recent TLT productions such as *Burning The Living* (2014), wore black. In *Gaia Global Circus* costume additions helped them portray different characters. They occasionally moved off the stage into the auditorium, as did the performers in TLT’s *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* described in chapter one.

⁵² Latour, *Waiting for Gaia*.

⁵³ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p.129.

⁵⁴ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p.182.

In my performance experiments, there is an open invitation for visitors to contribute to the event. This took the form of song, poetry, music, dance, digging, a yoga class, fire juggling and gifts of pond plants for example. My intention, however, was to remain mute during *Man Digs Pond*. Initially, I failed to achieve this as visitors wanted to converse and it seemed inappropriate to ignore them. My point is that in all my experiments the audience either do all or most of the talking. This has the advantage of helping me understand, as a participant observer, how audiences are reacting to the performance but it also makes the performance social in a different way to the experience of watching *Gaia Global Circus*. Latour's intention was to stage a collective uncertainty: "It is not a question of scientific or didactic theater, but of a collective experience, of a global circus where artists, spectators and scientists share the same uncertainty."⁵⁵ However, the certainty and confidence of his authorial position in terms of performance methodology contrasted with the contingent, muddy flows between artist and spectator during *Man Digs Pond*.

Morton's 'dark ecology' proposes a change of thinking; a turn towards solidarity with the entities that humans are enmeshed with and a turn away from processes of 'agrilogistics' that exploit those entities. Every attempt to control, dominate and master 'nature' leads us further away from the coexistence that Morton demands and deeper into catastrophe. Humans must allow themselves to be humiliated in the face of hyperobjects and embrace the ironic position that things we have thought of as separate, measurable and containable now turn out to be enmeshed with us and unimaginably out of control. The crisis that we observe is the crisis of ourselves. The question then, for Morton, is how can art respond?

On the opening page of his recent monograph *Dark Ecology, A logic of future coexistence*, Morton concludes: "If we want thought different from the present, then thought must veer toward art."⁵⁶ I hope to answer the questions he asks a couple of sentences later: "Or is art veering toward thought? Does it ever arrive?"⁵⁷. This thesis must arrive at a conclusion but that conclusion will be the foundation of future experiments. I will never arrive, (until I am buried, or burned or fed to vultures in my final dwelling place) because the ecological thought involves the looping processes of artistic practice, thinking, reading and writing that moves the practice forward. When I dig a pond, plant a tree, or

⁵⁵ On-line Brochure for Festival Scene D'Europe, (28 Nov – 13 Dec 2013). Accessed 23 June 2017. <http://www.lacomiedereims.fr/sites/default/files/RSE%202013%20Brochure.pdf>

⁵⁶ Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology, A Logic of Future Coexistence*, (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2016). p. 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.2.

move excavated earth across the city into the School of Arts at Birkbeck, my thinking is performed both in the sense that it brings into being that which it names, and in the sense that it occurs in proximity to others who are offered space for their own ecological thought.

It would be fair to say that digging is an unusual activity to choose for performance practice and this generates tensions that are explored throughout the thesis. However, as I have explained in the earlier pages of this introduction, it is an especially *appropriate* activity for ecological inquiry because uniquely it reveals the constituency of what is normally hidden beneath the surface. Whenever the ground is dug for agriculture, construction, archaeology, gardening, burial or for fun, transactions between the material of the lithosphere (the earth's outer layers of substance), the moisture of the hydrosphere (the sphere of water) and the gasses of the atmosphere are revealed. The activity of digging on a beach as a child is not a matrixed 'performance' in the sense that it is not a deliberate and considered act such as a piece of theatre, dance or performance art. I am not playing a character or pretending I am somewhere else and the action takes its own time. However it does exhibit a certain 'performativity' in the sense that it gives material form to that which it names: digging in the sand. I am performing a task under the gaze of my parents but outside the context of a deliberately constructed performance event. I am also learning about the constituencies of sand, air and water so we might call this kind of digging 'performative research' or what Robin Nelson calls "doing knowledge".⁵⁸

When I carry out the tasks of planting trees through Albion Millennium Green (chapter one) I am doing knowledge but as the thesis progresses and digging is re-considered as a performance event for a particular place and community, my practice also becomes 'performance research' and an opportunity to speculate about performance techniques and processes that are able to translate the experience of digging into the experience of the seeing other.

There are many performance scholars and practitioners who have thought through the ways that performance might provide a platform for the ecological thought. Stephen Bottoms, Aaron Franks and Paula Kramer, for example, propose a "leaning towards dealing with things and materiality, a desire to touch, turn over, **dig in**, step on and think about as *directly as possible ...*".⁵⁹ *Multi-Story Water*, led by Bottoms, has been running throughout the course of this research project. It aimed to discover, "whether site-specific performance

⁵⁸ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts; Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.) p. 66.

⁵⁹ Stephen Bottoms, Aaron Franks and Paula Kramer, 'On Ecology', Editorial for *Performance Research: On Ecology*, 17 – 4, August 2012, p 3.

might usefully be applied to raising awareness of flood risk in urban river catchments among 'hard-to-reach communities' ".⁶⁰ *Multi-Story Water* is an extensive, multi-disciplinary practice-based research project involving performance, film-making, history and interactive mapping that has produced a multitude of practical outputs and, no doubt stimulated a good deal of thought and discussion about the waterways of Shipley in West Yorkshire. Bottoms gets his hands and feet metaphorically dirty by, for example, wading through the rubbish-strewn Bradford Beck with a video camera. The project was an attempt to raise awareness of, and celebrate an ignored resource but my performance practice is not about *celebration* of what we have. It is about *looking again* at what we have and working out how we should act to avoid things getting worse. Given the resources available to Bottoms, my response to the brief of the Shipley project might have been to gather a team of hydrologists, ecologists, biologists and actors to perform the action of planting a reed bed upstream and provide habitat for birds and marine life and, by soaking up flood water, prevent some of the worst impacts of flooding downstream.

Una Chaudhuri has called for "a new materialist-ecological theatre practice"⁶¹ that refuses to use nature as a metaphor for the human. Chaudhuri, a performance scholar, ignited debate concerning what an ecological theatre might be when in 1993 she called for a response from theatre makers to the "urgent necessity" of ecological action. Her central proposition was that performance makers "join ecological concerns with the protocols of 'site specific' theatre, creating works that directly engage the actual ecological problems of particular environments".⁶² This requires an end to the use of nature as a metaphor or as representation. My original motivation for digging a pond was to provide standing water for wildlife in Albion Millennium Green. The pond was posited as being important for its own sake. As Chaudhuri concludes, "Theatre ecology, I believe, will call for a turn towards the literal, a programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor."⁶³ The title of *Man Digs Pond* was a literal description of what happens during the 24-hour duration of the show. In this long, thin story there is space for the visitors to have their own ecological thought.

Baz Kershaw offers a valid critique of Chaudhuri when he rightly asserts that the theatre is a place where metaphor is embodied in processes of production. You cannot dig

⁶⁰ Stephen Bottoms, 'Multi-Story Water, Celebrating Shipley and its waterways', Downloaded, 23 August 2017. http://multi-story-shipley.co.uk/?page_id=129

⁶¹ Una Chaudhuri, "There must be a lot of fish in that lake": Toward an Ecological Theatre' *Theatre* 1994, vol. 25, No. 1, p. 23.

⁶² Chaudhuri, "There must be a lot of fish in that lake" ', p. 23.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 29.

a pond for wildlife on a theatre stage because wildlife would never find it and what about the next show to take to the stage? Chaudhuri and Kershaw do agree that a post-modern theatre that self reflexively refers to its own conditions of production and reception, and acknowledges the distance between audience and artist or the theatre and the 'natural' world, is able to use what I would call 'literal representations' of nature in order to undermine, challenge and re-think our relationship with the nonhuman. As Chaudhuri puts it:

By making space on its stage for ongoing acknowledgements of the rupture it participates in – the rupture between nature and culture, forests and books ... – the theatre can become the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness.⁶⁴

During *The Last Adventures* by Forced Entertainment (a show I rehearsed and performed in during the course of this research project), deliberately theatrical scenographic, two-dimensional cut-outs of objects (see Figure 14) were deployed to acknowledge and highlight the gap between what happens on stage and our everyday ecologies.⁶⁵ The performance was rehearsed and performed in the Ruhr industrial region of Germany (before touring). The venue was the converted turbine hall of a disused Victorian coalmine that still houses the giant coal powered generators that powered the machinery used to extract coal. Here, an important source of Anthropogenic atmospheric and geological transformation is made evident in a place focussed on digging up coal for burning. The show attempted to negotiate our ecologies through the deliberately theatricalised representation of trees, clouds, water, the solar system and stories, war-games, myths and fairy tales that humans have told and enacted in order to justify and promote the gap between humans and the 'natural' world.

The performers in *The Last Adventures* were often obscured behind the cut-out representations of clouds, trees and water (design: Richard Lowdon). Comprehensible language was limited to the opening ten minutes of the performance, during which trees, held in front of a performer, gradually took over the stage and began clustering and breaking off in a series of manoeuvres during a thumping soundtrack played live by Tarek Atoui. In terms of what the audience see, the trees are in front and the performers are

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *The Last Adventures* by Forced Entertainment and Tarek Atoui. Premiere: Maschinenhalle Zweckel, Gladbeck, Germany, 5 September 2013. A co-production of the Ruhrtriennale with Forced Entertainment, Fierce Festival, Birmingham; Mousonturm, Frankfurt; Tanzquartier, Vienna; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. For full cast and creative team, video and photographs, see: <http://archiv.ruhrtriennale.de/www.2013.ruhrtriennale.de/en/programm/produktionen/tim-etchells-the-last-adventures/index.html>

largely hidden. We know the performers are moving the trees but it feels as if the idea is to tell the trees' stories rather than the human performers' stories. In the audience's translation of the trees' stories, and the deliberate failure to express or represent a real tree, the ecological thought might occur.

The Last Adventures would have made an interesting case study for this thesis except for the facts that there was no digging during the show and it could not be considered my own research, even though I contributed creatively to the performance, because I was a paid performer fitting into the creative enterprise of Forced Entertainment and their team. It would be hard to argue that it was my own original research. Nevertheless, I argue that *The Last Adventures* by acknowledging the gap between theatre and real life and between humans and the nonhuman, revealed a way of performing on stage that allowed for the ecological thought.



Figure 0.14 Rehearsals for *The Last Adventures* by Forced Entertainment and Tarek Atoui, 2013. Interior of Maschinenhalle Zweckel, Gladbach Germany. Trees, clouds and a sun used in the performance rest against the wall of the venue. Photo: The Author.

Forced Entertainment were recently described by *The Guardian* critic, Lyn Gardner, as “gloriously in love with the conventions of theatre, its tawdry glamour and conjuring

acts.”⁶⁶ Again, to reiterate my point: I am not arguing that theatre is unable to engage with the ecological thought but, if it is to acknowledge the failure of humans, it should also acknowledge the role of culture and theatre in that failure. An ecological theatre, I argue must engage with the ironic realisation that it is a part of the problem.

Kershaw argues for a dissolving of boundaries between spectator and performer to produce “participants in ecologically responsive action which recognises and embraces the agency of environments”.⁶⁷ He looks to the early happenings of Allan Kaprow (chapter two) and immersive experiences, where the audience directly participate in the action to provide “suggestive indicators for future ecologically responsible performance”.⁶⁸ I am inclined more towards Kaprow’s *later* experiments, including *Trading Dirt*, where participation often means watching Kaprow dig and intimate and improvised conversations between artist and spectator that inform the actions of the artist. My contention in this thesis is that the degree to which a performance is able to bring forth the ecological thought is not a function of degrees of participation in the action. It is rather a function of the extent to which a performance is able to correspond with the everyday stories and narratives brought to the event by the spectator. I am not opposed to spectators contributing, in their own way, to the action but I also argue that distance between the roles of spectator and artist allows space for the ecological thought. The paragraphs above also aim to justify my contention that the degree to which a performance is able to engage with ecology is not a function of the site of performance; theatre or non-theatre. It is rather dependent on the extent to which the performance is able to correspond with the community that experience it.

The case studies I examine in this thesis are, like myself, concerned with degrees of audience participation and proximity and with the ways in which the site of performance can impact on its production and reception. They are all interested in the ways in which the cultural frames of theatre stage or art gallery can be challenged by undermining their socio-economic conventions or moving outside their geographical walls. The Living Theatre (chapter one) and Allan Kaprow (chapter two) provide important historical and artistic contexts for performance’s move from theatre stage to the non-theatre site but it is also important to understand the implications of this shift for the landscape of contemporary performance culture within which my practical experiments with digging have emerged.

⁶⁶ Lyn Gardner, ‘Dirty Work (The Late Shift) Review’ in *The Guardian* Newspaper, 28 June 2017. Downloaded 13 July 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/28/dirty-work-late-shift-review-forced-entertainment-battersea-arts-centre-london>

⁶⁷ Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 317.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The experiments that form the practical core of this thesis belong to a paradigm in contemporary performance practice and scholarship that takes the *activity* of theatre outside the theatre *building* and was initially theorised by performance practitioner/scholars such as Richard Schechner⁶⁹ and Allan Kaprow⁷⁰ in late 1950s and 1960s America. In the last decade this development in theatre practice has grown into what scholars of the genre have described as a “main strand of British theatre”⁷¹ that has received “growing critical interest, both in the UK and internationally”.⁷² I will call this paradigm *site-specific theatre*. Alternative terms such as site-responsive, site-related, site-sensitive and site-generic theatre could apply to my performance experiments but all these terms point to one area of concern: the ‘place’ or location of performance and the experiences and processes that flow between the location, the spectators and the performance event.

As Fiona Wilkie contends, “site-specific theatre privileges place” and is able to respond to and interrogate “a range of current spatial concerns, [and the] ... spatial dimension of contemporary identities (personal, communal, national and international).”⁷³ This thesis illuminates the ways in which our communal and personal histories and the emerging narratives of a site and the differently resonating meanings of those histories for visitors and the performance they witness can make manifest and reveal, celebrate, confound or criticise the specifics of a site. A performance can draw attention explicitly or implicitly to any part of that history: from the geological forces that acted upon the site millions of years ago, to very recent, on-going or future human interventions. By digging into a ‘vacant’ lot, TLT revealed the geology of the site. However their interest was not in geology as such. Turning the earth over gave form to the company’s internationalist desire for economic, sexual and political revolution. A single place can contain many incompatible locations and resonances that can be juxtaposed and highlighted in the context of a live performance.⁷⁴ It is not feasible for a performance to attend to every moment or resonance

⁶⁹ Richard Schechner, ‘Six Axioms for Environmental Theatre’, *TDR: The Drama Review*, 12 (3), 1968, pp. 41-64.

⁷⁰ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley, (London, Los Angeles, Berkley: University of California Press, expanded edition 2003, 1st edition 1993).

⁷¹ Michael McKinnie, ‘Rethinking Site-Specificity: Monopoly, Urban Space, and the Cultural Economics of Site Specific Performance’, in Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins (Eds), *Performing Site Specific Theatre, Politics, Place, Practice*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 21.

⁷² Joanne Tompkins, ‘The ‘Place’ and Practice of Site-Specific Theatre and Performance’, in Birch and Tompkins, *Performing Site Specific Theatre*, pp. 1-17.

⁷³ Fiona Wilkie, ‘The Production of “Site”: Site-specific Theatre’, in Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (eds), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) p.8. Quoted in McKinnie, ‘Rethinking Site-Specificity’ p. 23

⁷⁴ Fiona Wilkie, ‘Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behavior’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No.71, August 2002. p. 244.

in the history of a site. Rather, as Wilkie contends, it is the job of the performance, “to find a means of indicating what is important in this instance, for this performance”.⁷⁵ For my practical experiments, the focus is on the ecologies and economies that emerge between the taskscape and the people who perform or watch the social labour of digging.

In 2014 the biennial London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) emphasised the importance it places on taking performance off stage and into the city. An editorial about the Shunt performance collective is titled, “SPACE INVADERS: From warehouses to railway arches, abandoned shops to disused baths, the most exhilarating theatre is happening offstage.”⁷⁶ Tristan Sharpe’s use of the word “INVADERS” in block capitals suggests that the exhilarating potential of site-specific theatre is sometimes tinged by processes of appropriation, occupation and exploitation of communities and places. James Marriott, member of the artist-led collective, *Platform*, who have been making site-specific performance since 1983, is clear that theatre occurring outside the theatre building can just as easily “fuck off the local people”⁷⁷ as exhilarate, engage or excite them. Artists that are parachuted into communities to produce site-specific art that ticks the ‘credibility box’ of the arts establishment and funding bodies and then disappear after the event can antagonise, disrupt or upset communities that have developed a long-term relationship with the site. I examine some of these issues in part B of chapter one as I raise funds for *Man Digs Pond* and negotiate with regular users of AMG who feel uncomfortable about my appropriation of public land for a project that benefits me financially and professionally.

I have attempted (and sometimes failed) to avoid the pitfalls described above by developing long-term strategies and relationships with the places and communities through which my experiments occur. The duration of the performance events themselves, while perhaps marking the most concentrated period of interaction, represent a relatively short period of engagement compared with the processes, dialogues, problems and discoveries that are generated during dialogic transactions before the event and in its aftermath. With my own performance experiments there is an opportunity to document, recall and analyse these conversations and record some of the longer-term impacts that endure after the performance. Verbal transactions with, for example, ‘John John’ myself and others who dwell in AMG are analysed in chapter one where I argue that the social labour of digging during a period of ecological and economic chaos generates knowledge about human and

⁷⁵ Wilkie, ‘Kinds of Place at Bore Place’, p.258.

⁷⁶ Tristan Sharps, ‘SPACE INVADERS’, Brochure for LIFT 2014, *Where the City Meets the Stage*, pp.10- 11.

⁷⁷ Stephen Bottoms, Evans and Marriott, ‘We, the City’, *Performance Research*, 17 (4), August 2012. p. 150.

non-human life, suggests alternative ways of dwelling, and builds communities through the ecologies and economies of a city.

My research uncovered a surprisingly extensive variety of digging practices that were performed for the gaze of others and more private digging practices that expressed something more about dwelling than cultivation or construction. London's Mole Man of Hackney, for example, William Lyttle, spent forty years digging tunnels under his Victorian house. When they were discovered in 2006, it was found he had dug down to the water table saying to a journalist, "that's the lowest you can go," and extended a tunnel system twenty meters outside the boundary of his house in "every" direction. Forty tons of excavated material was removed from his garden and the tunnels were filled in with concrete to avoid the collapse of nearby houses and the road.⁷⁸ It is perhaps pointless to ask why Lyttle persevered with his tunnelling exploits. The cramped, dark, damp tunnels and the self-realising activities of digging and excavation were, like the pond digger in *Man Digs Pond*, strange expressions of his identity: it made him feel human. "His face lights up when he relates stories about holes under the towpath on Regents canal or secret underground train networks ... 'Tunnelling is something that should be talked about without panicking'."⁷⁹

When John Edwards dug a hole and buried himself in a coffin for three days, his motivation, according to one witness was clear: "In a bid to warn people of the dangers of drug abuse, he will be lying in his own coffin and talking to people online about his harrowing story."⁸⁰ This confinement underground speaks of a dark underworld of drug dealing, addiction, exploitation, greed and death. In 2014, The Dig Collective (Mark Morgan Dunstan, William Bock, Alberto Duman and Sophie Mason) dug a cube shaped hole, two meters square and two meters deep in the garden of a rectory in Hackney (again), London.⁸¹ Artists were invited to respond to the hole in an open call. One visitor projected an image of the garden above onto the walls of the hole using a pinhole camera, producing ghostly images of trees that looked like root systems through the earth. The Dig Collective often see their role as providing a platform for others to express their creative energies, in

⁷⁸ Paul Lewis, 'After 40 years' burrowing, Mole Man of Hackney is ordered to stop', *The Guardian*, 8 August, 2006, downloaded 18 March, 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2006/aug/08/communities.uknews>

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Simon Robb, 'This man is going to live broadcast himself being buried alive', *Metro*, 22 July 2016, Downloaded 22 August 2017, <http://metro.co.uk/2016/07/22/this-man-is-going-to-live-broadcast-himself-being-buried-alive-6021777/>

⁸¹ See dig collective website, <http://digcollective.co.uk> and link to Mark Morgan's page, accessed 22 August, 2017. <http://markmorgan.co/#!/group/DIG>

the same way I tried to encourage ecological exploration by other artists and researchers on AMG during *LEAF*. They would have made an interesting case study for this thesis, as would the Mole Man of Hackney and John Edwards. It could rightly be argued that they have more in common with my own experiments, in terms of scale, intention and visibility.

In chapter four there is analysis of more hidden practices of guerrilla gardeners and in particular Paul Harfleet whose *Pansy Project* involves digging small holes and planting a single Pansy in particular sites where homophobic abuse has occurred. Kaprow's practice developed into a quieter, personal, less mediated practice, but his influence on contemporary performance practices did not wane as a result and here the focus is on three case studies whose work has had a lasting impact on the landscape of performance practice and creative ecological action. The case studies I have chosen to analyse have documented and written about their digging practices and they have been critiqued and discussed by scholars and practitioners allowing me to gauge my practice through the lens of the foundational practice of others. The influence of Artaud on TLT and the role of the everyday in the work of Kaprow is clearly evidenced in their creative outputs and in the writing that has developed alongside their practice.

In 1958 The Living Theatre was introduced to Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*⁸² and the company's directors, Judith Malina and Julian Beck were to take literally one of Artaud's central assertions: "Above all we must agree stage acting is a delirium like the plague, and is communicable."⁸³ Chapter one examines two early performances of TLT that illuminate the influence of Artaud, the engagement with ways of dwelling in the city and a re-orientation of the audience/spectator binary: *The Connection* (1959) and *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964). The former explored the dark sub-culture of the street drug scene and the contemporary 'plague' of heroin addiction in New York City with actors shooting up on stage and begging for money in the theatre bar during the interval. *Mysteries* involved the performance of a graphic death by plague that the audience were invited to enact with the performers. Dead audience members were piled on stage and dead performers were sometimes carried out of the theatre.

Plague is for Artaud and TLT both a symptom of a sick society and a metaphor for a general collapse and 'delirium'. Artaud was interested in the behaviour of survivors who must dig graves for victims. During *Man Digs Pond* in London (chapter one) one neighbour called the Police at 3am because they thought I was burying a dead body. When there is

⁸² Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, in *Collected Works 4*, Trans. Victor Corti, (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974).

⁸³ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.20.

digging to plant trees or create a wildlife pond there is a desire to generate life and build communities but there is also a sense of loss, of sacrifice and of 'giving something back' that is connected to the spectre of our own demise and return to the earth. I conclude the section on TLT by comparing the ritualised dig in the vacant lot in Pittsburgh during *Turning The Earth* with the ritualised dig during the burial of the company's co-founder, co-director and lead actor, Judith Malina in 2015.

TLT channelled the thinking of Artaud to transform the performer into a vessel to carry their revolutionary pacifist anarchist message. They hoped that revealing the pain, injustice and violence of society would transform their oppressed audience into psychically, sexually, socially and economically liberated beings. Before *Turning The Earth* TLT had spent months performing in the threatened steel mills of Pittsburgh where the aim was to reveal to the workers their position in the class struggle and motivate them to overthrow the forces of capital and seize the means of production. But after *Turning The Earth* in a vacant lot in a residential street, the performers dropped their stage personae and created a community garden with the help of local residents.

In this methodological shift from a choreographed, directed and considered performance with a narrative structure, a beginning, middle and end and clear spatial and ontological divisions between actor and spectator to the improvised digging of the garden and casual conversation between performers and participants there is a transition between forms. The creation of the garden was an open-ended activity that encouraged the audience to engage with digging, bring their own stories and, according to Beck, "has given us a great deal of credibility as a group of people who not only talk about change and radical action but who can manage to arrive at intimate conversations with Pittsburgh people."⁸⁴

TLT and Kaprow used the performance and task of digging earth to question, trouble and un-settle economic, social and political structures. They have also concerned themselves with digging through the layered boundaries of established arts practices, arts institutions and creative methodological frameworks. During the years after World War II, TLT and Kaprow embraced a radical re-orientation of aesthetic practice that questioned the structures of the New York City art and theatre markets and the relationship between the artist and the spectator of art. In terms of performance this re-orientation was felt most acutely in the deconstruction of physical, metaphorical and existential boundaries between the artist and the spectator of art. In other words art was taken out of the gallery and

⁸⁴ Beck et al., 'Turning the Earth', p 94.

performance off the stage and out of the theatre and into the everyday world where, deprived of the traditional spatial binaries of stage and auditorium, artists and visitors were encouraged to dwell, converse and act with each other.

As Kaprow's career progressed, he gradually rejected traces of creative technique, artifice and the institutionalised structures of arts practice. By the time of *Trading Dirt* (1983-1986) he had replaced the carefully structured and intensively mediated Happenings for which he had become famous, with meandering private encounters and conversations he called 'events' that are mediated through a few photographs and his own re-telling.

In the light of TLT and Kaprow, I realise it was the intimate conversations with neighbours while I dug holes for trees on Albion Millennium Green in 2010 and 2011 that encouraged me to consider the labour of digging as social, generative of knowledge and an expression of our relationship with our place of dwelling. I evidence some of these conversations and interactions in part B of chapter one which traces the route from the everyday activity of digging holes for trees to digging in the context of a matrixed performance event: *Man Digs Pond* in London in 2011, where visitors are invited to watch me dig a pond for 24 hours and accompany the dig with songs and music. Despite a desire to remain distant from the visitors and dig in silence the performance became a series of verbal interactions between visitors and performer. In Reims in 2013 when I dug a pond in the garden of a theatre (chapter two), there was an opportunity to re-configure the audience/performer relationship and I was able to dig without speaking. In Reims, the visitors did all the talking in proximity to a theatre and contributed their own narratives, questions and experiences to the event.

In chapters three and four the thesis examines my performance practice as it corresponds with Birkbeck College University of London where I have dwelled during the course of this study. The audience and participants in the action of digging are very different to the communities of AMG and the garden of La Comédie de Reims and in chapter four I describe my response to the opportunity to extend the performance of digging through the communities, places and durations of Birkbeck's School of Arts for the final presentation of practice at the *viva voce* examination. When the video of *Man Digs Pond* is seen in the School of Arts there is what Rancière calls a "poetic labour of translation"⁸⁵ of the event through time and space into the community of the School. When

⁸⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, (London, New York: Verso, 2009), p.10.

visitors to *LEAF* dig the earth during *Where Do We Go From Here?* the process of translation is experienced through the labour of digging. When I perform live during *Man Digs Pond* I experience the labour of digging and the labour of performance that is then translated into the experience of those that see the dig.

Note on Documentation

Qualitative research, often associated with enquiry into social science, assumes the best way to gather data is to allow subjects to express their thoughts about an experiment in their own way, rather than responding to an analytical framework designed by the researcher. The researcher might gather verbal, visual or sonic data in order to shed light on the research question and the findings associated with qualitative research are usually presented in written form. In this research project, digital media such as photography and video are used to document, present and illuminate practical experiments. Written description and analysis of the digital media is then used as evidence of the enquiry and support for my argument. Considering the ephemeral nature of live performance, the value of recorded media should be questioned. If a performance is designed to be experienced live, then viewing a recording of the performance, however thorough, would present a different, perhaps limited or partial experience to the intended one. Viewing a recording is not the same as experiencing the live event. Indeed, for the final, submitted performance that will form a part of this research project, it will be essential for examiners to experience the performance as it is intended; as a live event that disappears in its material form once it has finished. Yet video, photography, design sketches, diagrams and maps can all support the dissemination, presentation and explanation of the research by providing evidence of processes, problems and important moments of discovery that were not necessarily visible to me as participant observer during the event.

Photographic documentation is presented throughout the thesis. Videos appear both on-line and on a memory stick on the inside back-cover of the dissertation's hard copy. The way I have chosen to present my practice on video has changed during the course of the research project. The video of *Man Digs Pond* in London (2011) was not created to help me answer a research question or evidence research. It was rather an attempt to disseminate my practice, get the work seen more widely and perhaps encourage further iterations of the performance. Aesthetic decisions were left to the video maker, Wania Grek, who operated the camera and lights and edited the video. His major concern was the aesthetic rendering of an artistic event and he went to great lengths to provide

architectural lighting for the shoot and added music to the video. His edit virtually ignored the contributions of song and music from the visitors. To highlight the relationship between the visitors and the artist, I re-edited the footage myself to include a selection of musical contributions.

I have evidenced my research *during* my studies with two videos that reflect a declining interest in the aesthetics of video production and a turn towards the video as research tool. It is worth noting that when a performance is also an experiment, largely improvised and open in its relationship with the audience, it is very difficult to know how to document a performance and what parts of the documentation will help to answer a research question. A partial view inevitably excludes other parts. Aesthetic choices inevitably intrude on the editing process to highlight particular interactions and/or encourage a wider dissemination of the work. Music was added to the video of *Where Do We Go From Here?* for the same reasons that music was added to the video of *Man Digs Pond* in London. The music highlights the rhythmic nature of digging or the rhythms of the visitors' participation in the action of digging, contributing to a sense of ebb and flow in the action. Aesthetic choices were also influenced by the thought that the *Little Ecological Arts Festival*, of which *Where Do We Go From Here* was a part, could work in a variety of contexts and music and editing might encourage others who view the video to consider hosting a form of the festival in their own locality. Filming and editing the video myself allowed me to highlight particular moments that are relevant to the research. When I was filming the event as a participant observer, the technical demands of filming and the administrative demands of running the event sometimes made it difficult to observe proceedings as they happened but the video allowed me to look at and listen to *parts* of the event again and pinpoint moments of interest (chapter two). This is how Forced Entertainment develop and perfect their shows. During all rehearsals and some public performances a video camera records the action. If something interesting happens, the precise timings and actions are recorded, not for public dissemination but to help the creative team develop the performance (though they increasingly use live streaming video to disseminate live performances more widely rather than help develop the performances). The documentation of *my* performance practice should, in the context of a PhD dissertation, evidence my practice through its dissemination, help me answer the questions that I ask at the beginning of this Introduction *and* help me move the practice forward.

As my research progressed and for the documentation of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims (2013) aesthetic considerations were replaced by an interest in how video might evidence

the relationships between audience, performer and materials during the 24-hour duration of the performance. For this reason, and to avoid missing any particularly interesting moments, I decided to capture the entire event from a fixed camera. It is unlikely that anyone would sit through a real-time video of the 24-hour show, though I considered the value of having it play in real time as a gallery installation. In terms of my research inquiry, it was more useful to view the entire event in a speeded up version.

The event's temporal compression from 24 hours into a three-minute video (and twenty-minute alternative) serves several important functions. It creates a playful relationship with time that juxtaposes the slow duration of the live performance with the 'slapstick' energy of the speeded-up performer on video. The three-minute version shows a frenetic performer and it is hard to see any detail of my gestures. However it also allows me to see the general flows and movements of both the visitors and the materials; earth, water and tools. Compared with the performer, the visitors appear still for the minutes or hours that they spend with the performance: sitting in deck chairs, standing around and clustering; moving towards or away from the pond and finally dancing around the pond to celebrate its completion. The decisions they made regarding how to position themselves in proximity to the digging man gives the viewer a sense of their social relationship to the event unfolding around them. That is, it gives the viewer a sense of the relationship between the audience, the labour of digging and the performance of labour that they are witnessing.

Performing Social Labour and the Labour of Performance

The key issue for Kaprow was the relationship between the work or labour of creative production and the economics of the speculative art market where art is valued according to its exchange value i.e. its potential to trade for profit. Kaprow emerged in reaction to the post-war anti-communist sentiment that consumed political life in the US and with the help of his teacher at Columbia University, art historian Mayer Schapiro, he formulated an arts practice that foregrounds the social value of the labour of art production rather than its monetary value. A brief divergence into Marx is necessary as a compelling theoretical framework through which to view the labours of digging, scholarship *and* performance.

For Marx 'wage labour' is when the owner of capital pays the worker a wage to produce goods or services that are sold for profit that is kept by the capitalist. There is no

material connection between the consumer of the product, the profit made by its sale and the labourer who made it who is 'alienated' from the product of their labour. As Marx argues in *Grundrisse*: "The labour which stands opposite capital is *alien* [*fremde*] labour, and the capital which stands opposite labour is *alien* capital".⁸⁶ However as Terry Eagleton notes Marx was interested in the productive potential of different kinds of labour that re-connect the labourer to what is produced. This labour might be directed towards cultural or social production or as Eagleton puts it, towards "playing the flute, savouring a peach, wrangling over Plato, dancing a reel, making a speech, engaging in politics, organising a birthday party for one's children."⁸⁷ We might add digging a pond, planting a tree or writing this dissertation. Labour for Marx is not only about economics but also about bodily needs, human agency, the senses, individual self-fulfilment and *social* cooperation. Labour and production are for Marx the fundamental expressions of what makes us human.

Digging a pond, swapping buckets of earth or digging holes for trees are not economically productive labours but they are labours that transform the landscape and our relationship with that landscape and with the people who dwell there. The kinds of labour that I gather together under the 'social' of the title of this thesis are forms of praxis or what Eagleton calls, "self-realising activity by which we transform the world".⁸⁸ When the labour of digging is performed as cultural practice there are economic relationships such as who gets paid for what and constraints on the activity caused by the economic relations that govern the ownership and use of land but there are also transformations of the landscape and social transformations produced by the labour of performance.

This thesis is interested in both the labour of digging and the labour of performance for as performance practitioner and scholar Sara Jane Bailes argues: "As a form of labor ... theatre making offers one of the most sophisticated and creative ways that humans seek to render imagining tangible."⁸⁹ For art historian Meyer Schapiro, his pupil Allan Kaprow and for Jackson Pollock and his drip paintings, art must reflect the labour of its production. For Kaprow, that meant less painting and more action and he turned away from the gallery and towards the performance of everyday tasks in the everyday places in which we dwell. Eagleton argues with Marx "The basis of culture is labour. There can be no civilisation without material production."⁹⁰ For Allan Kaprow and for my own experiments with the

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Trans. Martin Nicolaus, (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1973, 1st published 1939), p. 266.

⁸⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) p. 125.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 31.

⁹⁰ Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, p. 107.

labour of performance and the labour of digging, production takes the form of material transformations of the landscape as well as the constructions that surround a performance event: lighting, costume, sound etc. The performance of labour is extended out of the theatre and into everyday environments and the everyday durations of life in the city.

As I trace in chapters three and four the development of my practice through the geographical and intellectual landscape of research within the university there is a reversal of Kaprow's move out of the gallery because performance in the university building has involved studio and gallery presentations and a different community of correspondents. In my final presentation for the *viva voce* examination, there is a reflection of the studio presentations of sound artist John Cage who was influenced by Artaud and had an impact on Kaprow that is traced through chapter two. Cage's *Untitled Event* (1952) influenced Kaprow's early performance in a New York City loft, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) that launched his career as an artist of international repute in his own right. Yet Kaprow rejected the theatre building and the gallery in favour of the chancy, social realm of the city-street and public park.

Paradoxically he has encouraged me to see the studio, gallery and theatre building as an everyday environment like anywhere else with its own labours, rules and spatial characteristics. Digging is normally done outside and spades are not the normal tools of scholarship but I bring them into the School of Arts. The juxtaposition of an exterior visceral manual labour with the labour of thinking, reading, speaking and writing inside the university generates tensions, dramas and new experiences.

When I sit in the sand and move with the spade and the surrounding materials, or when I translate Neil Armstrong's dig onto the page, the experiences generate knowledge that is qualitatively very different but I argue commensurate in its contribution to understanding. In this thesis the labour of digging that has been performed, documented and written about by others is viewed from the mediated distance of images and written accounts but is translated into my own performances of digging and both are translated into the labour of this written dissertation. There is labour in the generation of knowledge and in the writing, reading, speaking, thinking, documenting and listening that have been the necessary labours of translating my practice into this written submission and into the thinking, writing and performing of others. These labours are evidenced here as social

labour in the realization of creative potential and as such, according to Terry Eagleton, they give form to “Marx’s vision of communism.”⁹¹

Time and Durations of Digging

When Kaprow explores the everyday, his focus is on our daily activities or labours: “What is interesting to art, though, is that everyday routines could be used as real offstage performances.”⁹² When he describes action, places and objects as ‘everyday’ he refers to their rhythmic temporal qualities and their open-ended durations. Digging may be a daily activity for a few people in the city: road maintenance crews, gardeners, allotment holders or construction workers but it could not be described as something we all do everyday like cleaning teeth or putting on clothes. For many of the school pupils who dug a hole for a tree on Albion Millennium Green (chapter one) or dug a pathway (chapter two) it was the first time they had handled a spade. On the other hand, digging does happen everyday in many neighbourhoods in many cities and it would be impossible to say when digging began and when the last square of earth will be dug. For Ingold, it is the rhythmic patterns we experience in a place that give texture and form to our lives. The taskscape has an “intrinsic temporality” that is expressed “in its rhythmic interrelations or patterns of resonance”.⁹³ Digging has its own rhythms expressed in the sound of metal cutting through substance and the bodily rhythms of the human that has to adjust her technique according to the form of the tool and the materials being dug but digging into our lithosphere also relates to longer durations.

The ecological processes with the longest durations are surely those involving the slow but continual emergence of our geologies: a process dramatically accelerated by volcanoes, earthquakes, mining, landfill, deforestation, nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, industrial farming, monoculture and the burning of fossil fuels. All these processes are traced through our emerging geologies. The proposal that we are living in the geological age of the Anthropocene lays the blame for geological transformation on the human race, the Arthropod. I ask if the acceleration and transformation of geological processes can be blamed on an innate human desire to fell trees or dig through our geologies and burn fossilised carbon. Blaming our predicament on the material demands of the Arthropod

⁹¹ Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, p. 59.

⁹² Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 187.

⁹³ Ingold, *Perception of The Environment*, p.154.

gives the real culprits a free reign to keep digging, burning and producing more. Most of the known reserves of fossilised carbon in the lithosphere must remain where they are forever *un-dug* if we are to have a planet that is worth dwelling on and that can only happen if our geologies are returned from the private to the public sphere. The knowledge that our geologies have been irreversibly transformed by human activity has forced us to rethink our relationship with time and the idea that we live on solid ground.

Kaprow following Zen Buddhism considered the performance of a weathering mountain and its geological transformation. Sound artist John Cage, drawing on Zen and Artaud, taught Kaprow the value of the chancy durations of the everyday when the sounds of traffic, weather and birdsong intertwine with temporally structured performance events. Performance, let's remember, is action in a place through time, and the extension of performance over longer time spans became a feature of Kaprow's development as an artist and culminated in the three-year long *Trading Dirt*. When I dig a pond for 24 hours, the durations of theatre performance and the durations of the eight-hour working day are extended. The audience are free to attend the event whenever they want and must decide how they will 'translate' the event into their own time. Heterogeneous durations of labour, wind, rain, daylight, plant growth and the limits of the human body are juxtaposed with regulated and homogenous clock time.

Henri Bergson has influenced scholars interested in durational performance practices and anthropologists who wish to understand the ways in which people dwell in, perceive and experience their environment. For Bergson, reality or real time is not a homogenous, artificial construction to be understood by observing the hands of a clock and dividing time into hours, minutes and seconds. Clock-time according to Bergson involves the ego "separating its present state from its former states"⁹⁴ when the present second is only experienced as it immediately disappears into the past where it is lost forever. For Bergson the life and movement of reality is experienced as a flux, a continuous process of becoming.

Bergson proposes the concept of 'pure' or 'real duration' as an expression of the heterogeneity of life, experienced as, "a continuous or qualitative multiplicity with no resemblance to number".⁹⁵ My own experiments do not reject clock time. Indeed, attention is explicitly drawn to the aim of completing the pond in "24 hours". Clock-time as experienced in *Man Digs Pond* is no more or less 'real' than the 'labour time' of pond

⁹⁴ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, F L Pogson, Trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 2001 [1913]), p. 100.

⁹⁵ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p.105.

construction or the chance durations of weather. But it is the change and flow of time and the experiences this flux generates, sometimes in juxtaposition to the regulated clock-time of the 'everyday' working day, that generate meanings and experiences for the visitor and performer.

Duration might be considered, after Bergson's process of becoming, as the experience of the blurring or intertwining of past, present and future. When I dig by hand in the present there are references to a pre-industrial or pre-mechanised past and a time when digging by hand was perhaps an everyday activity for agricultural workers. I return shortly to the implications of a nostalgic glance towards a romanticised pre-industrial 'good life'. Yet digging also represents a projection into the future since digging is usually a means to an end, be that the construction of a pond, digging graves, digging furrows to sow a field of wheat or digging foundation trenches for architectural construction. When I dig through the present, I am referencing the past and projecting a pond or tree growth or a pathway through AMG into the future.

If performance is action through time, what unites all the performance practices I describe here is their ephemerality. Action involving the bodily presence of a human has a limited duration. In a theatre it is the end of the show when the curtain closes. When Kaprow built houses made of ice that slowly melted in the heat of a Los Angeles summer in *Fluids* (1967) the performance finished when the melted ice evaporated. After digging for 24 hours during *Man Digs Pond* in Reims, the audience improvised a dance around the pond, I took a bow and the performance was over. But the curtain did not close and the pond continues to emerge as a feature for years afterwards. When I first dug a pond in 2011, I was motivated by a desire to attract wildlife into AMG. Within months, transactions between earth, water and air had encouraged frogs, newts, insects and flora to colonise the pond. However, I also noticed that the pond attracted a multiplicity of human interactions some of which I describe in chapters one and two. The performance of digging had been an ephemeral social event but the enduring pond was generating social experiences between humans and between humans and the ecology through which they dwelled.

If the ponds survive for a few years in the precarious ecologies of the city, they too will eventually come to an end. The ecological art of Agnes Denes, analysed in chapter three extends further into time and space than the other artists explored here. With the help of thousands of people she built a mountain and planted a forest of 11,000 trees that is guaranteed by the Finnish government to be allowed to flourish for 400 years (*Tree Mountain - A Living Time Capsule* 1982-1996, Ylöjärvi, Finland). She designed a very

different kind of pond to my own, not for frogs and newts but for algae that filters methane out of mountains of rubbish and emits pink smoke that drifts over the city, (*Rising Pink Clouds*). The digging necessary for the construction of these ponds and the labour of their production is apparent only in a written paragraph but there is a sense that while we continue to generate mountains of garbage, the ponds will continue to emit pink smoke.

In my own digging experiments and in the digging practices of all three case studies, there is sometimes nostalgia and a romantic harking back to an idealised rural past. Nostalgia can be a powerful experience. Some of the digging practices of Agnes Denes involve hundreds or even thousands of diggers but in chapter three I argue that scaling up the performance of digging can also foreground the idea of a rural idyll without negotiating a way out of our predicament. I ask how, when digging involves mass participation, such as *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes* (2015) in Milan city centre, the multiple narratives and heterogeneous experiences of individuals can be overwhelmed by the authorial voice of the artist and the economic rules that govern behaviour on the site and in the wider community.

If I have a romantic attachment to a time before our fossilised geologies were dug up and burned into the atmosphere, my concern is to speculate about future ways of dwelling. But I have no romantic illusions about the hard labour of digging, day after day. Neither do I have any illusions about the difficulties of life for a subsistence farmer in the suburbs of London in the seventeenth century. I am sure it was a life of uncertainty, injustice and hardship. Since digging in the sand on Newhaven Beach in 1964 I have experienced many times the backache and blisters of digging for a meagre wage (usually to pay my rent between acting jobs). This thesis does not argue that artists, actors or anybody should pick up a spade and start digging fields of potatoes or a tunnel for the high-speed rail network. On the contrary, a dis-automated future when we can no longer burn oil to dig fields or sow crops must follow eco-agricultural and permaculture models that explicitly *reduce* the need for digging and employ naturally occurring life forms, like earthworms, to do the work for us. Yet there is a sense that while humans are able to dwell on the planet they will continue to dig, along with rats, foxes, dogs, wombats, badgers, moles, rabbits, ants, naked mole-rats, pika, meerkats, mongooses, solitary bumble bees, wasps and earthworms.

The 'other than human' digging of the above is the subject for another thesis or a future performance. My point is that humans are not the only life forms that mark their dwelling places by digging through the lithosphere. As Denes shows us in *Rising Pink Clouds*,

there are other life forms that thrive by digesting methane and clearing up our mess. These creatures, algae and fungi will be, I argue, our willing helpers if humans can turn away from ecological chaos towards a future when digging is a social labour that is directed towards the creative generation of life through our lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere.

Charles Darwin was pointing towards an ecological future of coexistence when he looked backwards towards a time before the mechanisation of agriculture:

The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed by earth-worms.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Charles Darwin *The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through The Action of Worms*, (D. Appleton & Company, New York, 1890). p. 313.

Chapter One

Theatres of Digging and Dwelling: The Site of Performance and the Communities of Audience and Performer

Introduction

This chapter interrogates both the theoretical and methodological foundations of my performance experiments. In part A TLT's performance of digging and Antonin Artaud's influence on their early performances provides a theoretical frame through which to understand and critique the relationship between the place of performance and the communities of audience and performer in my own performance experiments. I ask how digging earth is manifested in their practice, and how TLT embraced Artaud to support their challenge to the spatial binaries of stage and auditorium by encouraging actors and audience to dwell together on stage, in the auditorium, in the theatre bar and in a vacant lot in Pittsburgh.

The performance methods used in the experiments that form the practical core of this thesis are founded in my experiences of performing in theatres and have been modified and developed in the light of my research. TLT offer a theatre-orientated model of performance that, in *Turning The Earth* in 1975, used digging to negotiate a political and emotional relationship with a residential street in central Pittsburgh. I share a theatre orientated performance history with TLT so when the company performs a stylised, ritualistic biblical narrative during *Turning The Earth* they are experiencing the same transition from theatre stage to the found or 'everyday' location that has been a feature of my own performance practice since 2011. Some of the pitfalls, insensitivities or dissonances that my own and TLT's practice are prone to when a non-theatre site is appropriated or occupied by a performance event are also considered in this chapter.

Part A analyses three performances by TLT that illuminate their radical approach to the place of performance, their debt to Artaud and specifically their desire to break down spatial and ontological divisions between the communities of audience and performer; *The Connection* (1959), *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), and *Turning The Earth* (1975). Community is examined here through the lens of each show's negotiation of the audience/performer relationship and particularly the emergence of the community garden in Pittsburgh directly after *Turning The Earth*. The chapter asks how the social dialogues, dramas and transactions it generated point towards both a new way of performing and a new way of dwelling. In their radical approach to the relationship between audience and performer and in their renegotiation of the spatial rules governing the place of

performance, TLT have made an important contribution to a theatre culture that allows the communities of performers and audience to dig and dwell through the same place.

During many tours around the world, TLT was in a near-constant state of tension with authorities. Life for the TLT was as much about confrontations with theatre managers, police, audiences, critics, judges, landlords and tax authorities as it was about confronting conventional theatre practice. The result was that the TLT rarely stayed in one place for long but maintained a restless and exhausting search for a place to dwell that is reflected in recent productions: *Burning The Living* at the Burning Man Festival (2014) in the Nevada desert, where they constructed a temporary theatre for public rehearsals of *Nowhere To Hide* (2014) performed on the streets of New York City while the company was being evicted from its Manhattan residence. This chapter examines their way of life as well as their way of performing and through the company's ways of dwelling I uncover digging practices that resonate with the digging practices that form the foundation of my own performances of digging. Like TLT, my professional life as a performer has been focussed on touring and until 2007 I had rarely had an opportunity to spend more than a few months in one place or community. When I had a chance to put down roots in London and feel settled as part of an urban community my response to the financial crisis that engulfed that community in 2008 was to dig. TLT's response to a relatively stable period of dwelling in Pittsburgh in 1975 as part of an industrial, urban community in a state of economic collapse was also to dig.

Part B of this chapter asks how, in the light of TLT, my foundational practical experiments with digging operate from the perspective of the place where digging happens and the community through which it moves. The digging experiences analysed in part B emerged during the labour of digging holes to plant trees in Albion Millennium Green (AMG) in London in 2010. The tree planting took place outside of any art or performance context yet the dialogic transactions, dramas and conversations I experienced while digging transformed the individual task into a social activity and encouraged me to consider constructions that would change the everyday task of digging into what I call a 'theatre of social labour'.

I ask how the practice I describe in part B of this chapter (and the remaining chapters) diverges from the work of TLT. This divergence is most clearly apparent in the ontological position of the performer. Performers in *Turning The Earth* transform themselves both psychically and physically into characters that are digging to illustrate the Old Testament narrative of *Cain and Abel*. During experiments with digging described in

part B, the people digging perform the task as their 'everyday' or off-stage selves in order to plant trees or create a wildlife pond. After *Turning The Earth* performance constructions fell away and the actors returned to their off-stage personae as they worked with the audience to create the garden. The social transactions generated during the creation of the garden are reflected in my early digging experiences described in part B and point towards the social labour visible in the performance practice of Allan Kaprow that will be analysed in chapter two but here the contrast between TLT's performance of digging during the show and in its aftermath are highlighted.

The aim of my practical experiments is to thread the performance of digging through the particular community and place in which the digging occurs. Parts of the community may not always be happy about the experiment and in those conflicts there are also paradoxes and dramas that can articulate the relationship between a place and the people who inhabit it. Part B of this chapter examines some of the conflicts, dramas, economic relationships and dialogic transactions that emerge when I occupy public land and dig holes to plant trees in AMG and occupy the land again in 2011 to perform the action of digging to create a wildlife pond for the 24 hour duration of *Man Digs Pond*.

The chapter begins by examining TLT's relationship with their place of dwelling through the struggle to construct a theatre and a place to dwell in Manhattan in 1958 and the social transactions encouraged by the building work. It was during this hard labour that the group were introduced to Antonin Artaud's radical proposals for a theatre that challenged the theatre establishment to embrace the dark realities of life and encourage the audience to experience the pain of the world to the same extent as the actors. Artaud proved to have an enduring influence on the company and on contemporary performance practice in general. With a focus on the psychic and physical transformation of the digger and the grand narrative, what I miss from TLT's performances are the ordinary, the everyday and the complexity and multiplicity of our ways and places of dwelling that are referenced in Kaprow's experiments, by Artaud and in my own practical experiments with the performance of digging.

Part A - Critical Case Study

The Living Theatre, Antonin Artaud, Ways of Dwelling and the Performance of Digging

The Connection

In New York City in the summer of 1958, TLT were engaged in the hard labour of converting a former department store into their new dwelling place: the 14th Street Theatre. Hundreds of tons of sand and cement were shovelled, carried and mixed and thousands of bricks laid in stifling heat.⁹⁷ Visitors left cash, drugs or food or offered on-site psychoanalysis. The physical suffering endured by the company's co-directors, Julian Beck and Judith Malina and their volunteer workforce must have been substantial during the conversion. Beck was addicted to Dexedrine⁹⁸ and diagnosed with colitis. The directors were fingerprinted in order to get a theatre licence and they began a tortuous relationship with the tax authorities.

The labour involved in their new dwelling and their interactions with neighbours, artists, writers, the street culture that shared the city, and with those in positions of authority over use of the land, involved creative, economic and social transactions that had an important impact on the company's future development. For example, one visitor to the building site was Mary Caroline Richards⁹⁹ who had been working as the registrar at Black Mountain College while translating Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art Exile and Outrage*, (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 148.

⁹⁸ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 150.

⁹⁹ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁰ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 87.

At Black Mountain College, Richards worked with experimental musician, John Cage, who was later to occupy a floor of the new theatre and donate his large collection of percussion instruments to TLT. In chapter two, I show how Cage, one of Allan Kaprow's teachers, embraced both Artaud's utilisation of sound as a spatial experience and Artaud's rejection of naturalised speech but for TLT, Artaud also offered a theoretical foundation for their experiments with the un-settling of the spatial relationship between performer and spectator. Richards left the printer's proofs of her translation among the rubble of the emerging theatre.¹⁰¹ In 1959 she gave a lecture on Artaud as part of a series of poetry readings at the recently opened 14th Street Theatre.¹⁰² In the same year TLT opened *The Connection* by Jack Gelber.

The Connection offered a brutally raw examination of drug addiction in New York City during which some actors injected real heroin in front of the audience.¹⁰³ There was a deliberate and disturbing confusion established among the audience between who was an actor and who was a 'real' addict from the New York street drug scene. The action involved a filmmaker creating a documentary about a drug culture that he doesn't understand but is keen to exploit. Addicts refuse to participate in the project while, "awkwardly staring at the audience, and offering, quite gratuitously, abrupt, discontinuous confessions explaining their attraction for their life-style. Sometimes, they are filmed by two cameramen with glaring floodlights, forcing them as the *New Yorker* critic Donald Malcolm observed, into the 'grimacing smiles of a toothpaste commercial'."¹⁰⁴ Dealers sold drugs and actors begged for money during the intermission.¹⁰⁵

The programme notes¹⁰⁶ for *The Connection* included excerpts from Artaud's preface to *The Theatre and Its Double: 'The Theatre and Culture'*.¹⁰⁷ Here, Artaud outlines a theatre of protest against "idolatrous" culture, "At a time when nothing holds together in life any longer, when we must revise all our ideas about life". Artaud called for a theatre that reunited life with culture as a "rarefied way of understanding and exercising life". He demanded violence, pain and suffering from a theatre that had neglected the painful realities of life and a 'theatre of cruelty' involving the enactment of plague, death and disease. Perhaps Beck, addicted to amphetamines at the time of the production, shared

¹⁰¹ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 146.

¹⁰² Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 153.

¹⁰³ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁴ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction' in Mariellen R. Sandford, (ed), *Happenings and Other Acts*, (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-28.

¹⁰⁶ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁷ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, pp. 1-6.

with opiate addict Artaud the experience of drug withdrawal and a vision of the contemporary 'sickness' of addiction. As Beck argued:

We had to show that we were all in need of a fix, and that what the addicts had come to was not the result of an indigenous personality evil, but symptomatic of the errors of the whole world.¹⁰⁸

The Connection had a jazz band playing throughout the performance and the musicians were regularly disappearing to buy heroin or collapsing on stage in a drug-induced stupor. According to John Tytell, the Jazz Quartet acted to enliven the space with free improvisation that was, "organic and dynamic, a force on its own."¹⁰⁹ If Michael Kirby saw no need for 'acting' in the performer who begged for money at the interval, he also saw a fully matrixed 'role' being acted out. For Kirby, no amount of ordinary clothing or "improvised conversation will remove him from the character-matrix that has been produced".¹¹⁰ I argue that the jazz quartet operate differently. They are attempting to carry out a professional task rather than play a character. The musicians understood this distinction with alto-saxophonist in the show, Jackie McLean stating: "When I perform the sax I remain who I am; I don't transfer my whole being into becoming another fictional person".¹¹¹

I argue here that the performance of the jazz band and performing the social labour of constructing a theatre gives form to Kirby's idea of nonmatrixed performance and to Artaud's demand for performance that connects to the dark realities of life, enlivens the place and blurs the distinction between life and theatrical performance. For Beck, the improvisational qualities of Jazz became an exciting model for the theatre.¹¹² Perhaps the contribution of the jazz quartet in *The Connection* embodied Artaud's closing line of 'Theatre and Culture' in his call for performers that are "like those tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames." This image dwelled with the company fifty-five years later in *Burning The Living* at The Burning Man Festival in the Nevada desert, the climax of which is the ceremonial burning of a giant sculpture of a man. The intervening years saw exile, violence, imprisonment, illness, drug addiction and poverty as well as thousands of

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, pp. 156-157.

¹¹⁰ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', pp. 1-28.

¹¹¹ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 156.

¹¹² Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance, Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 49.

performances, the death of Julian Beck in September 1985 and both critical disdain and acclaim. Before examining *Turning The Earth* I now turn to *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964) to illuminate the importance of Artaud's thinking on TLT as it developed into a company of international repute and became an important constituent of theatre's avant-garde.

Mysteries and Smaller Pieces

Plague as both a symptom of a decomposing society and metaphor of revolutionary transformation was an important element of Artaud's thinking and it was to become a recurring theme for TLT. We might take the indiscriminate threat of death by plague as a metaphor for the precarious condition of the contemporary human and deadly threats of viruses but also military conflict, extreme weather, ecological destruction, food shortages, flood and drought. Survivors of military conflict must dig through the rubble of bombed out buildings and bury the dead. Perhaps the most well known diggers in the history of English theatre are the two gravediggers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who celebrate the increasing security of their employment in times of political turmoil.

A paradox that runs through this thesis is that on the one hand digging into the earth often equates to burial and death but on the other hand the aim of my digging experiments is to build communities and generate life. There is an ecological tension generated in this paradox that will be returned to in chapter three. We might find dramaturgical tensions also in the fact that Shakespeare's gravediggers are referenced as being clowns. The comedy arises from the benefits they accrue from the untimely death of others. The dramatic power of this irony is revealed by Shakespeare's use of gravediggers to provide an explicitly comic exchange but we might look at other less innocent professions such as weapons manufacturers, human traffickers or drug companies who benefit from violent conflict, plague, precarity and the untimely death or enforced migration of others.

In *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* untimely death is represented by enactment of the process of dying from plague and the audience are encouraged to participate in that death. In the 'Theatre and The Plague', the first chapter proper of *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud describes in gruesome detail the effect of plague on human organs and the "frenzied pointlessness" of the erotic fever it induces in its survivors.

The remaining survivors go berserk; the virtuous and obedient son kills his father, the continent sodomise their kin. The lewd become chaste. The miser chucks handfuls of his gold out of the windows, the Soldier Hero sets fire to the town he had formerly risked his life to save. Dandies deck themselves out and stroll among the charnel-houses.¹¹³

Theatre action, Artaud argues, should be on a par with action induced by an epidemic.

“Above all we must agree stage acting is a delirium like the plague, and is communicable.”

It is the terrifying purifying, transformative potential of the plague and of theatre that appealed to Artaud and TLT. “It unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life.”¹¹⁴

Artaud sees echoes of his theatrical vision of plague in ancient fertility rites such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, where “The terrifying apparition of evil [is] produced in unalloyed form”.¹¹⁵ Judith Malina read these words in 1958¹¹⁶ and took up Artaud’s call. In *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, which opened in Paris in 1964, TLT attempted to bring Artaud’s vision of plague onto the stage and they developed methods and techniques of production that were to remain crucial to their development for the next fifty years.

Mysteries began with a single man standing silently and passively on stage looking out to the auditorium until the audience begin to react. This offered a direct challenge to the audience’s expectations and encouraged vocal interventions. According to Richard Walsh responses were: “usually confined to a predictable range of jibes and a certain amount of debate within the audience over what they were or were not entitled to expect from a trip to the theatre.”¹¹⁷ Most commentaries on *Mysteries* focus on the latter stages of the show during which the actors move through the aisles while performing their death while the audience are encouraged to join in. Malina and Beck discussed with Richard Schechner the methods used in rehearsal to arrive at this scene, and in the absence of a playwright or text, directorial authorship is made apparent.

Beck: We keep talking about The Plague, for instance, as an exercise in locating the pain and watching the pain travel around the body, feeling it. And there has been a kind of directorial process of guidance, of criticism.

¹¹³ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.14.

¹¹⁴ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.20.

¹¹⁵ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.19.

¹¹⁶ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 199.

¹¹⁷ Richard Walsh, ‘Radical Theatre in the Sixties and Seventies’, (BAAS Pamphlet No.4, 1995). On-line (accessed 10th December, 2014): <http://www.baas.ac.uk/richard-walsh-radical-theatre-in-the-sixties-and-seventies/>

Malina: The first time we did it, it was just as intense. There were some people who couldn't do it well and we worked with them. The first time we did it was in Belgium. And [Beck] sent a letter suggesting a new ending for *Mysteries*, which we had done once in Paris with a different ending, with a free theatre ending - with anybody doing anything they wanted to. Julian suggested doing Artaud's version of the plague. We sat down and we read Artaud out loud, and we read Julian's letter out loud and we talked about thirty minutes then we did it and those people that didn't make it, we talked to about why they didn't make it. Mostly they were not finding specific enough pain or not taking it out far enough.¹¹⁸

Though scenes were improvised in rehearsal and performance, there was clearly a right and wrong way of improvising the plague scene. In the same interview, Malina describes the company's methods for recruiting performers. Actors did not audition in the traditional sense but rather endured a period of initiation, during which they had to 'follow' the company on their tours for months on end without any pay and with minimal support from the company. Eventually, if they displayed the right level of devotion, they were invited into rehearsals. In a sense, the performers were not collaborating in the creative process but were rather interpreting the creative vision of the directorial authors. Breathing exercises, meditation, yoga and exercises designed to hone physical skills helped prepare for improvisations that were designed to encourage performers to 'make' Beck and Malina's vision. Here is John Tytell's description of the scene:

Some actors clutch their bodies – sputtering, blubbing, groaning, gasping – writhing on the ground. Overcome by fear and panic, the actors drop to the floor; others roll off the stage and lurch into the audience. In tears, salivating, staggering, shuddering, actors grasp the arms of the aisle seats, doubling over at the feet of audience members. Like medieval doctors during the plague crisis, six of the actors rise and arrange the dead in a pyramid onstage.¹¹⁹

With no text, with the actors moving among the audience, and extremes of physical expression, this description suggests the dying performers might be enacting a cruel Artaudian plague. What about the survivors: the audience and performers? The audience, though offered the opportunity to participate in the action were expected to 'make it' in the way prescribed by the directors.

Introducing the plague was in part an attempt to restrain the audience that had got seriously out of control during the premier of *Mysteries* in Paris when a member of the audience piled the seats into a mountain, which he then climbed and began giving the Nazi

¹¹⁸ Judith Malina, Julian Beck, Richard Schechner, 'Containment Is the Enemy', *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 13 (3) Spring, 1969. pp. 35-36.

¹¹⁹ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 200.

salute, repeatedly screaming obscenities.¹²⁰ The plague offered a channel for the audience's energies, yet Malina complains that while lying 'dead' in the aisles, audiences in Europe sometimes kicked, poked or punched her, even setting her hair alight to see if she would move.¹²¹ In America audiences were much more polite and tended to comfort or nurse the dying. In Europe the plague scene was associated with the Holocaust and in Brussels around fifty audience members died with the actors. In Vienna the fire department ended the show when a group of acting students took to the stage to die. In Amsterdam, much to the annoyance of Beck, the audience carried 'dead' performers out of the theatre with the intention of throwing them into a canal.¹²²

TLT welcomed 'improvisation unchained' and audience participation into their work, yet performances quickly developed into set-pieces in which 'making it' followed the same general pattern every night while the audience were often confined to a very particular response. With no script, the plague scene was to be created as something 'else' each time. According to Richard Walsh if each performance is at liberty to define itself, there is a paradoxical tendency towards rigidification and:

an inevitable slide into formula and closing down of possibilities. This applied not only to the options pursued by the actors themselves, but also to the responses they were willing to accept from the audience, so that the apparent openness came increasingly to mask an underlying coercion.¹²³

The 'berserk' plague survivors described by Artaud carry out all manner of activities; "the virtuous and obedient son kills his father, the continent sodomise their kin. The previously lewd become chaste." Artaud suggests that people respond to the plague in a variety of ways that challenge normative social, sexual and economic behaviours. TLT's plague survivors were encouraged to behave in a very particular way that corresponded to the vision formulated by the company.

Schechner saw many of TLT's performances throughout the 1960s. When he 'went up' and comforted Malina during her death from plague, he was disappointed that there was no reciprocity from Malina.¹²⁴ She appeared to be in a trance-like state and in a world of her own. Likewise, during the company's next production, *Paradise Now*, when Schechner responded to the performers' call to undress, he did so and tried to enter into

¹²⁰ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 200.

¹²¹ Malina et al, 'Containment Is the Enemy', p. 34.

¹²² Malina et al, 'Containment Is the Enemy', p. 34.

¹²³ Walsh, 'Radical Theatre in the Sixties and Seventies', part 2, paragraph 8.

¹²⁴ Malina et al, 'Containment Is the Enemy', p. 35.

conversation with performers but felt angry when he was ignored.¹²⁵ TLT's political agenda; that revolution is achieved through psychic transformation and sexual liberation, brought radical new methods and techniques to the stage and brought audience and artist into physical contact, but for Schechner, their monistic approach and directorial methods separated TLT from more post-modern theatre practices that were beginning to emerge in America in the 1960s, (such as Kaprow's, perhaps). In 1981 he wrote:

Theatre doesn't 'do' politics, anymore than it does ordinary life or ritual. All of these processes – ritual, ordinary life, politics – stand side by side with the theatrical process. ... Theatricality is a process that is braided into these other processes. ... The same event can be political, ordinary, ritualized, and theatrical. These ought not to be organized in a preconceived hierarchy but in a living braid, an organic structure/process.”¹²⁶

In the decades after the publication of Mary Caroline Richards's translation of *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958) TLT embarked on a series of European and American tours that included; performances from their emerging repertoire, street protests, political meetings, demonstrations and clashes with police, the courts, right-wing agitators and academic and city authorities. On 16th May 1968 for example, Beck and Malina waving black flags led a crowd through the streets of a riot-torn Paris towards the venerable Odéon Théâtre de France. The company, together with students, workers and actors occupied the theatre, transforming the whole building into an open stage for “twenty-four hour periods of confrontation and debate”.¹²⁷ Actors left the stage to join the audience, bringing them on-stage for defiant group acts of spiritual and sexual liberation that sometimes spilled out into the surrounding streets. Overcrowded performances and lectures could descend into a kind of chaos that Artaud might have approved of, with political or cultural rivals hurling abuse at each other. TLT never lost their devotion to a particular, ritualised performance practice but with *Turning the Earth* the everyday actions of digging, construction and dwelling braid through the landscape in ways that were perhaps unforeseen by the company. Their interest in the way performance intertwines with and might resist the regulatory, economic and social frameworks that control the place of performance developed into an over-riding concern.

¹²⁵ Malina et al, 'Containment Is the Enemy', p. 29.

¹²⁶ Richard Schechner, 'The Decline and Fall of the (American) Avant-Garde: Why It Happened and What We Can Do about It', *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1981) pp. 18-19.

¹²⁷ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 232.

Turning the Earth: A Ceremony for Spring Planting in Five Ritual Acts

The text of *Turning The Earth* is transposed in *The Drama Review (TDR)* by 'TLT Collective' together with the thoughts of Beck and each performer.¹²⁸ The first public performance in the industrial city of Pittsburgh (21st March 1975) was recorded and published on DVD by Craig B. Highberger.¹²⁹ The following analysis of *Turning The Earth* is based largely on the evidence provided by the performers in *TDR* and Highberger's video.

The performance took place on vacant land next to a house the company were 'occupying' in the north of Pittsburgh during a residency in the city. They approached the site through residential streets as a distinctive group. As they moved each member of the group vocalised in a slightly different way with loud screams, screeches, howls and cries. Tension in their voices was reflected in the bodies of the performers, in shifting tableaux of thrusting, straining gestures, crawls and strides in the direction of travel. A high-pitched bell tolled every twenty seconds or so, and the performers froze in silence. The bell rang again after a few seconds and they returned to their procession. Eyes were fixed in the direction of travel. One child took part, in the front of the procession, intermittently turning back to check on the other performers. Another child joined the front of the procession, striding, and crawling forward, then checking on the adult performers behind her.

This procession was intended as part of the city's 'Summerfest' during which streets are closed for a spring festival. In the background marching bands, speeches and crowds are heard on the video, suggesting a more traditional street procession nearby. I can imagine that the highly energised procession, an unusual intervention in the residential streets of Pittsburgh, in contrast to the more traditional procession, lends a certain excitement to the environment. Experienced live, it must have been a powerful announcement of the performers' presence and passers-by on the video appear transfixed, if a little bemused by the stylised physical and vocal actions of the performers. Despite the improvised participation by one child who appears to join the group from the crowd, there was a clear demarcation between the stylised action of the performers and the onlookers, who are standing around on the pavement or leaning against buildings, garden walls or parked cars. The performers move along the road, rather than pavement, and there is no

¹²⁸ Beck, et al. 'Turning the Earth', pp. 94-105.

¹²⁹ Craig B. Highberger (Camera operator and Editor), *Turning the Earth: A Ceremony for Spring Planting in Five Ritual Acts*. DVD published by Highberger, restored from original black and white half-inch open reel EIAJ master tapes, purchased directly from Highberger, 2013.

eye contact or physical or verbal interaction between performers and audience during the procession.

When the group, including the two children, arrived at the chosen site, which had various placards and digging tools waiting, they stopped vocalising and sat cross-legged in a circle, facing the centre. The performance was divided into five sections. The first, 'The Heritage of Violence' involved eight scenes between eight different pairs of performers during which acts of 'subjugation' were played out. Faces were pressed into the ground, the oppressed were dragged about and ridden like horses, while the seated performers drummed the ground with their hands. Here is a description of the eighth pair:

8. Tom [Walker] and Pamela [Badyk]. Tom rises and goes to Pamela. He stares down at her, then places his boot on her shoulder and forces her over backwards so that she semi-somersaults, resting on her neck, her feet above her in the air like the arms of a human chair. Tom sits on her and makes a broad mask of pleasure. Pamela makes the sound of her anguish. Tom rises abruptly. The sound stops. He returns to his place. Pamela initiates the new rhythm.¹³⁰

These acts of subjugation were a clear comment on the contemporary human condition that was soon to be revolutionised through the action of digging.

Part Two, 'Retching the Past', involved a shamanic cleansing ritual in which the seated performers placed an ear to the ground to listen to the earth's rhythm and swivelled round to collect pebbles placed behind them by a 'shaman'. Then "In their own way" the performers filled their mouths with the pebbles that signify the "dead past" and spewed them out into the circle. The children, though seated in the circle and paying attention to the action, did not put the pebbles in their mouth.

Part three, "Rebirth" is the longest section and the one I focus on here. Beck emphasises again that the ritual can be performed in the performer's own way but must contain four essential ingredients.

This ritual is performed by each individual in whatever form each wishes to create or shape it. (sic)

There are four ritual elements:

1. That the spade, the tool of work, be used to re-awaken both the individual and the earth by breaking the ground and digging up some of the soil.
2. That the earth be rubbed into the hands of the digger, and into the forehead, a reminder of Cain's mark and of the legacy.

¹³⁰ Beck et al., 'Turning the Earth', pp. 96-97.

3. That at the end of the ritual the performer give the spade to the next participant, and in doing this gives the recipient of the spade a new name for the new season. (This part of the ceremony was suggested by the Naming events performed by the Papago Tribe and described in Jerome Rothenberg's anthology, *Shaking the Pumpkin*.)
4. That the ritual contain consciousness of rebirth.¹³¹

Each performer takes a turn to dig earth with a spade, while the others watch from the surrounding circle. It is worth quoting excerpts from each performer's response to the instructions as transcribed by the performers themselves. The following excerpts reveal the revolutionary concerns of the company and the belief in the necessity of a spiritual transformation to free the individual from the oppression of capitalism. Private ownership of land is countered by the action of digging through the landscape of the 'empty lot'. Chanting and stylised action build an atmosphere of ritual and reverence. Though there are many references to labour, digging becomes a symbolic action of transformation, renewal and regrowth, rather than an everyday act of labour.

Leroy House

I enter the center of the circle and thrust the spade into the soil chanting,
 Turn the soil
 Turn the soil
 Turn the soil
 Feeling the moment, I drive the spade several times into the earth.

Bob Massengale

iii) I discover the spade, a product of human creativity, and artefact to help fertilize the earth. Through the use of such extensions of our power, humankind becomes the self-mediating creatures of nature. I shovel a spadeful of dirt to the north, to the west, to the south, and to the east - pointing toward the unification of the world that development of the productive forces makes possible.

Mary Mary

5. Take spade – hold by end of handle.
 Point spade to sun.
 Incant – *FIRE*.
6. Lower spade – dig one spadeful, turn spade to spill the earth and say, 'Out of death'.

Tom Walker

I walked to the center of the circle and dug the earth. I put the spade in with strength, smoothly. As the metal hit the dirt for the third time, I cried

¹³¹ Beck et al., 'Turning the Earth', p. 97.

out in pain and fell down slowly along the spade handle until the spade and I were prone and parallel, my face in the dirt that had been dug.

Eduardo Silva

I assume a meditative position, sitting on my heels, and move the spade across my body, beginning at my knees and coming up to my head. When the spade is above my head, I thrust it downward into the earth. The birth is completed.

Jon Shultz

Takes spade
Sticks spade in dirt in center
Dances around in a circle, singing:
 I cannot move cannot move cannot move,
 I cannot move cannot move cannot move,
 I cannot move cannot move cannot move,

Jezreel

and Jon gives me the digging tool spade
which I grab for my life
and he names me:
 NO ONE OWNS THE LAND
I take the spade
And with my arms outstretched let it spin me around the circle
Until I am facing away from New Unfolding Mystery
I am facing people on the street
The spade my body stretches out to the people
 An offering
 WORKER OF THE EARTH
The spade finds the earth
 And up up to the sky
 The Earth flies dripping on everyone

Pamela Badyk

My name is now GLOW OF THE LIFE TREE
I respond by declaring the earth contaminated
Followed by a vowel consonant of the Hebrew alphabet
AYIN
translation something like – devils
I throw the utensil to the ground
Because it is an earth body and
Also contaminated
I DON'T DIG THAT! And shriek ROARING IN MY CHAINS!

Hanon Reznikov

Trying a few different spots, I tapped the ground and said, 'Hello?' I worried whether it would happen again, this spring. Then, there was a spot that gave gently; I drove home the spade. I knelt and slipped my hands into the new opening. Up came a handful into the light – earth – cool, moist and unmistakably alive. 'I've missed you,' I said and pressed some to my forehead. I gave the spade to Julian, calling him, 'Modern Art.'

Julian Beck

And as I enter the 4th quadrant, completing the revolution:

Revolution means new beginning,

I halt, I raise the spade up high, aiming it at the earth. I repeat, chanting:

New Beginning

Then, in Hebrew, as the blade enters the earth:

(rendered in English as *Bereshith*)

I dig deep, pushing the blade with the arch of my boot as far as it will go
and as I do I chant:

Bereshith means

NEW BEGINNING!

And, as I rub the earth into my hands I repeat:

NEW BEGINNING

And as I mark my forehead to remember in the midst of the ecstasy of digging the earth that the legacy of violence is still with us and on me, I repeat the words New Beginning again and again as I gather the earth in my hands and go to the spectators who are standing about and I offer them earth to touch and take,

Judith Malina

I stand and taking up the spade turn several clods of earth as I chant:

...

and I repeat in English – halfway between blessing and question:

“Who bringeth forth bread from the earth?”

Fanette

The spade comes down to the ground and I say:

“Love made me do that.”

And I dig, and I dig, and I dig, and I dig the hole.

The hole is dug, and I see the earth and I say:

“And because I have done it

I can see

It is earth.”

Carlo Altomare

And walking on the earth demonstrating the heavy burden of my labour
making a loud wailing sound

And wiping the sweat from my brow and flinging it to the earth

And speaking in a loud voice

WITH THE SWEAT AND JOY OF MY LABOUR

I DRAW FROM THE EARTH NEW LIFE

Chris Torch

Raising spade behind my back, a painful action towards liberation. I jam it into the earth, breaking ground, breaking chains.

Spade fall, hands free (spring) the woman in me is released, turning the soil of mother earth (matriarchal revolution).

The beautiful transformation.

Isha Manna Beck [aged seven]

Chris gave me the spade and I took it from him. He called me "WOMAN GROWING." I sang "la la la la la la la la it is nice to do the farming and it is nice to do the work and so I just do and have some fun".

Carol Westernik

Slam spade into the earth like nuclear fucking in the word
"IN!"

Dig Peace of the earth, symbolizing juxtaposition of the word
Screaming:

"FIRESTORM OF LIGHTENING!"¹³²

The site of performance is clearly designated by the circle formed by the performers. There is a challenge here to the audience/performer relationship of the theatre, where the audience face the stage and can see the whole landscape of action. Here, from any point among the spectators, only the backs of the nearest actors are visible. In terms of the spatial relationship between audience and performer, *Turning The Earth* discourages the kind of interaction between audience and performer that was so apparent in *The Connection*, *Mysteries* and *Paradise Now*. Yet when Beck moves among the audience and offers a gift of earth that the spectators receive in up-turned hands, there is a different kind of transaction. The gift or exchange of earth gives material form to a re-imagining of the economic rules of a site and is revisited by Kaprow in chapter two and my own experiments in chapter four. During *Turning The Earth* the distribution of earth stands out as one of the few moments during the show when a performer makes contact with the audience. The actors seem to be in their own hermetic world, distinct from the audience. Ritualised performance is the dominant form and the performers present themselves as a unified, cohesive group who, in the transformative act of digging, express their pain, hopes and desire for political, sexual and economic liberation.

An exception to this might be the performance of the child, Isha Manna Beck, who offers a light-hearted ditty about work and having fun. She jabs at the ground with the spade and her short playful song about farming and the fun of doing contrasts with the intensity of expression of the other performers. She reminds us, as does Allan Kaprow in the following chapter, that labour can be playful, social and fun as well as difficult, exploitative, oppressive, transformative, ritualistic, symbolic and theatrical. Isha Beck's short intervention cuts across the hermetic world created by the other performers, yet there are also several lines of text that point towards the idea of digging earth as a generative process of ecological repair.

¹³² Beck et al., 'Turning the Earth', pp. 97 - 105.

Bob Massengale

iii) I discover the spade, a product of human creativity, and artefact to help fertilize the earth. Through the use of such extensions of our power, humankind becomes the self-mediating creatures of nature.

Massengale is here hinting at a central paradox of this thesis. On the one hand, humans are capable of digging through the earth to grow food, to fertilise the earth, create ponds and generate life. On the other hand, humans have attempted to control the ecologies through which we dwell by digging them up with machines, extracting their minerals and ores, covering them in concrete and saturating them in poisonous chemicals. The Green movement is still split between those who think humans can develop new, artificial technologies that will get us out of the current ecological crisis and those who believe we must work with the Earth's existing agents of repair: with its earth, wind, water and light, and with its flora and fauna, to restore its ecologies. It should be clear to the reader by now that my position is with the latter. Digging in the city to create a wildlife pond, to plant trees or to grow food does not have to be backbreaking work but is a unique occasion when we can experience the transactions between the lithosphere, atmosphere and hydrosphere that form the ecologies through which we dwell and generate all life on earth. With *Turning The Earth*, it is easy to detect a softening of attitude to the audience from earlier works described above, and, in the collective creation of the garden after the show, perhaps a different way of thinking about audience participation and the ways in which theatrical space can be organised to emphasise the ecologies and economies of life in the city.

In January 1970 (five years before *Turning the Earth*), the company released the 'Living Theatre Action Declaration'.¹³³ In an effort to reach a wider, non-theatre audience the company divided into four cells, each with a different focus. Malina and Beck formed the 'Action Cell' to take performance out of the "architectural trap" of theatres and into streets and factories: "TLT doesn't want to perform to the privileged elite anymore ... TLT doesn't want to perform in theatre buildings anymore."¹³⁴ For the next few years, Beck and Malina developed work for many different 'everyday' or 'found' locations, from streets and squares to factories, offices and transport hubs and by the mid-seventies the company had developed techniques and skills to adapt their work to any number of contexts without provoking interference from local authorities. In Pittsburgh they spent time among the

¹³³ Bradford D Martin, *The Theatre is in the Street: Politics and Performance in Sixties America*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). p.77.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

mining and steel communities in what was the declining centre of US steel and coal production. This community involvement led to further questioning of the company's direction. Beck mused that he did not want to do theatre anymore but was unsure what to do instead.¹³⁵ Other members of the company were frustrated by the failure of their theatre work to bring change and turned to direct action.

Turning the Earth was part of a cycle of performances under the heading: *The Legacy of Cain*, that the company began working on while exploring the street as an arena for performance in Brazil in 1970. In the Old Testament story Cain, a crop farmer, kills his brother Abel, a shepherd, out of jealousy and anger. Subsequently Cain's crops fail and he is racked by guilt and torment. The narrative warns that violence does not lead to salvation no matter how hard life is. Beck and Malina, using Hebrew to re-iterate the link to the Old Testament, emphasise the transformative power of digging earth and cultivation of crops over Cain's legacy of violence and greed. Perhaps *Turning The Earth* was a last gasp attempt to bring the company together for a collective act of dwelling. By the end of the Pittsburgh residency the Lucha Cell, lead by long-term Living Theatre performer Jimmy Anderson (who was notably absent from *Turning the Earth*), went its own way establishing a food cooperative among the black community in its Pittsburgh residence.¹³⁶

The Lucha Cell's proposition was that helping to feed the poor through food cooperatives was a more direct and productive revolutionary action than performing the ritualised theatre of cultivation in *Turning The Earth*. The former extends social and economic networks and transactions and if successful challenges the free market conditions of capitalism, whereas the latter offered a closed, hermetic representation of revolution experienced by the performers and witnessed only by a largely sympathetic audience. However Beck emphasises the establishment of a community garden on the site after *Turning The Earth* during his introduction to the company's transcription in *TDR*:

The garden that we planted as a result of the play has flourished so well that it has become very much a feature of the neighbourhood. It has given us a great deal of credibility as a group of people who not only talk about change and radical action but who can manage to arrive at intimate conversations with Pittsburgh people, thereby deepening the total play of our presence and action there ... We return to Europe not so much by wish or plan, but because we can manage to earn enough money there to support ourselves and the creation of new work.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Martin, *The Theatre is in the Street*, p.80.

¹³⁶ Martin, *The Theatre is in the Street*, p.80.

¹³⁷ Beck et al. 'Turning the Earth', p 94.

It is in the transactions involved in the creation of the garden after the performance that produced the most interesting social exchanges for Beck and it is digging the garden and in the Food Cooperative, that we can detect a new way of thinking about performance, ecology, economics and what it means to dwell in the city.

TLT intermittently continued to perform in the street after 1975 but could not support themselves without ticket sales or, as in the case of Pittsburgh, sponsorship by foundations that they might seek to critique. There were many theatres in Europe who were able to offer rehearsal rooms and payment for the actors but theatres generally wanted the company to perform in the theatre buildings that supported them. The transcription of *Turning the Earth* finishes with Beck's description of Part Four of *Turning the Earth*: 'Community' and Part Five: 'Earthwork.' It is clear that 'community' here means the community of TLT. The performers stood in a circle with arms around each other's shoulders facing into the circle. On the video one woman appears to join the circle from the audience and the circle of participants improvise a choral hum that builds into a crescendo of "throats opened in unity and ecstasy."¹³⁸ With 'Earthworks', the company opens up to include the spectators, passers-by and the wider community:

V

Earthwork

As the chord dissolves, the performers take the tools and begin to dig up the ground, turning it over. Other performers speak to the spectators, talking with them about the ceremony and the condition of the land, of property and of how we can reclaim the earth for the community's benefit, for useful purposes.

At the first performance, as the performers began to spade the earth, the children of the community immediately asked to help, and soon the implements were in their hands passing out of the performers' hands into the children's' enthusiasm.

...

The earth was turned and the sidewalk turned into flowers. For many hours, until sunset the children played at agriculture.¹³⁹

TLT was soon to leave the community of Pittsburgh for a tour of European theatres. The legacy of *Turning The Earth* can be seen as the sowing of a seed of what is now a thriving community garden culture in contemporary Pittsburgh¹⁴⁰ that is reflected in many important urban centres such as New York City and London. The development and growth

¹³⁸ Beck et al. 'Turning the Earth', p 105.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See 'Grow Pittsburgh' website, www.growpittsburgh.org For a map of community gardens in Pittsburgh, see: <http://www.batchgeo.com/map/pghcommunityfoodgardens>

of these gardens suggests that the social labour of digging earth and ‘playing at agriculture’ as an expression of dwelling can help build communities by activating alternative economies and ecologies that encourage the capacity for all to flourish.

Burning The Living

Burning The Living, (25th August – 1st September, 2014) involved the construction and occupation of a temporary theatre at the temporary city of Black Rock during the *Burning Man Festival* in the Nevada desert. The festival is a now famous annual event in its 28th year where people are encouraged to live out their dreams or fantasies. Use of money is discouraged in favour of a ‘gift’ culture where food, drink and creative activity are voluntarily shared. Tens of thousands of attendees arrive and build fantastical vehicles and architectural forms and wear exotic, brightly coloured costumes. There is an anarchic sense of freedom encouraged by the festival though public sex or defecation is banned and Police are present to uphold the law. Police are excluded from private themed campsites where sexual activity, alcohol and drug use take any number of forms.

Documentation I uncovered of TLT’s contribution to the festival focuses on the construction of its “only black box theatre”.¹⁴¹ Sasha Maslov’s video documentation offers a time-lapse video of travel to the event and construction and deconstruction of the temporary theatre interspersed with still photographs of rehearsals and workshops in the theatre. In contrast to the exotic, fantastical costumes of many of the festival’s attendees, TLT company members during activity in and out of the theatre are wearing black. They appear to be involved in theatre exercises that show a remarkable resemblance to the group activities visible in the DVD of *Turning The Earth* forty years earlier. Performers are focussed on each other rather than an audience. They engage in yoga exercises, sit in a circle, close their eyes and presumably carry out the same choral exercises that are audible in Highberger’s documentation of *Turning the Earth*.

Malina’s health prevented her attendance at the festival and with the exception of one older member of the group the company seems to consist of adults in their twenties and thirties. The construction of the theatre and living quarters must have been a considerable logistical challenge and illustrates the performers’ commitment and energy.

¹⁴¹ From the Facebook page of TLT: <https://www.facebook.com/LivingTheatre> and video documentation of the event by Sasha Maslov on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeLXoxwMi_8. Both accessed 23/11/2014.

There is an essential engagement with the harsh desert conditions: windy, dusty, very hot during the day and cold at night. When digging is required for the posts that support the roof of the theatre a mechanised digger, presumably supplied by the festival, is used rather than manual digging tools.

The temporary theatre is located at the epicentre of the temporary city that is carefully mapped out in a semi-circle with the giant burning man at the centre of the circle. For each attendee, including TLT, the festival is perhaps an exercise in dwelling as they must negotiate their place in the city and construct shelter from the desert conditions. The heterogeneity of the contributions to the festival; the sexual activity, drug use, dancing, exotic costumes, music and living-out of fantasy and dreams and the resistance to normative economic relations given form in the 'gift' culture, suggest perhaps a vast theatre of cruelty as envisioned by Artaud. In their black costuming and their apparently exclusive theatre practice, my impression is that TLT's black box theatre space separated them from the festival as a whole rather than contributing to its heterogeneity.

Burning The Living was developed as a response to the company's recent eviction from their base in New York City. Unable to pay the rent at their Clinton Street residence in Lower East side Manhattan, Malina at 88 moved into a nursing home for those in the entertainment industry. In response to her eviction from her dwelling place she wrote *Nowhere to Hide* that was designed for public parks in New York City. *Burning The Living* became an opportunity to rehearse *Nowhere to Hide*. It is an appropriate title for Malina's final text: a street performance designed for public parks in New York City.

There is a sense that the revolutionary theatre promoted by TLT was unable to develop with the post-modern distrust of unity of form and the grand narrative. The performers are devoted to a particular theatrical form espoused by Malina, and though reviews of *Nowhere to Hide*¹⁴² focus on the performers' direct verbal and physical interaction with the audience in the everyday locations of New York City, there is perhaps a lack of the ordinary, the still and the quiet that allows the audience to see the human in the performer; the human that struggles to find a place to dwell or a way to dwell in the city.

This part of chapter one concludes with a nod to the gravediggers in *Hamlet* by returning to the idea that digging as an expression of dwelling in the city is perhaps most regularly made visible when we are faced with our own mortality and the end of our dwelling. The passing

¹⁴² See in particular an illustrated review by Hallie Sekoff accessed on line December 18th 2014: <http://newyorktheatrereview.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/hallie-sekoff-on-no-place-to-hide-by.html>

of time is highlighted by the ending of life and given form by digging through the surface of the earth. During *their* lives Malina and Beck faced a constant struggle to find a way of dwelling. The end for Malina came a few months after she was moved to the nursing home. After a life of struggle against authority and an unending quest to achieve “the beautiful anarchist revolution” the nursing home as a place to dwell must have forced her to accept the authority of her carers and quashed any sense of freedom. After a transient life on the road, prison and exile, it must have been a difficult transition to a place where she did not have the physical strength to struggle nor people to struggle with nor obvious antagonists to struggle against, though I wonder how her fellow entertainment ‘industry’ retirees would have viewed her.

Malina was buried on the 12th April 2015 in a Jewish cemetery next to Julian Beck (d.1985). A blogger, Benjamin Shepard, posted an account of Malina’s burial with the title: “Shoveling Dirt: Saying Goodbye to Judith Malina.”¹⁴³ Photographic documentation centres on the ‘half hour’ during which mourners took turns to dig into the pile of excavated earth and empty the shovel into the hole and on top of the casket. The experience was, according to Shepard, “... primal and very, very raw.”¹⁴⁴ This might be a theatre critic’s response to the performance of digging during *Turning The Earth* 40 years earlier when actors shouted and screamed their frustrations at an unjust world, wiped dirt on their faces, vomited pebbles and jabbed at the ground with a spade. In both situations there is ritual and a central narrative concerning death and also a shared methodology: the actors take their turn to individually pick up the spade and shovel the earth. In both situations there is an audience that watches the digger and they all experience the same ecologies of weather and earth. In part B, during tree planting in AMG I will revisit this process of taking turns to dig while others watch.

It is impossible to say that the burial of Malina was more or less ritualistic, powerful, raw or dramatic than digging during the performance of *Turning The Earth*. Left with memories of Malina each mourner will have a different experience of her burial. I can say that the scene of burial seems calmer, less confrontational and more serene than the performance of digging in Pittsburgh. The mourners, playing their part in the ritual, are transforming their psychic and physical states. They adopt the appropriate attitude of calm reverence and wear a costume of suitable formality. I imagine they refrain from any sudden

¹⁴³ See: Benjamin Shepard, ‘Shoveling Dirt: Saying Goodbye to Judith Malina’, published 14th April, 2015, in the blog: *Play and Ideas*, (accessed 11th May 2016);

<http://benjaminheimshepard.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/shoveling-dirt-saying-goodbye-judith.html>

¹⁴⁴ Shepard, ‘Shoveling Dirt’, paragraph 9.

movements or flamboyant gestures though the coloured hat worn by one mourner perhaps delineates this digger as having special significance in Malina's life. The contrast with the extreme vocalisations and physicality of *Turning The Earth* could not be greater.

There is clearly drama and theatre visible in the narrative of Malina's death and in the spatial rules and ritualised digging used to frame the burial in a place that authorises the action: a site sensitive performance if ever there was one. Beck and Malina's restless, difficult and yet creatively generative search for a place to dwell and a way to dwell was over. Remembering the dialogues between Malina, Schechner and the audience during *Mysteries* when she enacted her death by plague and had her hair set alight by a spectator, she would have been happy if she could have seen everyone 'making it' in the right way at her funeral. There is also drama and theatre in the digging during *Turning The Earth* and I draw on TLT's use of narrative when I dig a pond through the garden of a theatre, (chapter two). The narratives I explore are not the narratives of biblical mythology but the narratives that emerge from the community through which the performance moves.

When the garden was dug after the show in Pittsburgh the social labour of digging was not a symbolic, ritualised illustration of a narrative. The labour of digging was at the centre of the story and projected a garden that threaded through the community for seasons to come. In chapter three I examine how the performance of digging can generate knowledge about the ecologies through which we dwell and enact processes of healing and regeneration. In chapter two I examine the ways in which the performance of digging can confront and challenge the economic rules of the house that determine human activity within those ecologies and how it can affirm and build communities. Now, in part B of this chapter, I turn to experiments with digging that form the foundational experiences of this study.

Part B - Reflection on Personal Practice

From the Task of Digging to the Performance of Digging

This section examines how the 'everyday' task of digging holes to plant trees in Albion Millennium Green (AMG) in 2010 led to the constructed and considered performance of digging a hole for a wildlife pond, *Man Digs Pond* (2011) also in AMG. These experiences encouraged me to undertake this research and looking back at them in the light of TLT and Artaud in part A has illuminated the ways that the social labour of digging to plant trees can share certain conventions and characteristics with theatre and perhaps with an Artaudian 'theatre of cruelty'. I realise now that, like TLT building their theatre in the heat of a Manhattan summer, when I planted trees I was constructing a place to perform and building a community to perform through. AMG was to become the stage for several practical performance experiments that are explored in this section and in chapter two.

It is important to reiterate that this thesis does not reject the theatre as a place to negotiate and speculate about our ways of dwelling or explore ecology and economics. Neither does it reject deliberate imaginative constructions that transform the everyday action of digging into a performance event but I reveal in this section how my creative methodology diverges in important ways from TLT's. Rather than digging to illustrate a narrative like in *Turning The Earth*, I explain below how the task of digging generates its own narratives, dramas, experiences and dialogic transactions that might be compared to the experiences of TLT when they built their own theatre or dug a garden on a vacant lot in Pittsburgh.

For the digging actors in the experiments described below there are no prescribed textures of language but rather casual conversation concerning the site and the task of digging, small talk, joking, gossip and reminiscence. In AMG verbal transactions among diggers and watchers intertwine with the urban soundscape of traffic, trains and passenger

jets mixing with birdsong and wind rustling through trees. The diggers and watchers share the same soft ground, the same wind, rain and sunlight. Artaud would have appreciated the constantly emerging heterogeneous soundscape and the actors and audience experiencing the weather to the same 'cruel' degree. The following analysis evidences the ways that the task of digging can generate experiences, dialogic transactions, dramas and tensions that articulate Artaud's vision of a theatre that reveals the dark and painful realities of life. I also evidence the ways that, like Shakespeare's gravediggers, Misha Beck in *Turning The Earth* and my first attempts to dig sand on a beach in Newhaven in 1966, the task of digging can at the same time be playful, fun, generative of knowledge and a theatre of social labour.

Digging Holes With 'John John'

On May 3rd 2010 I organised the planting of ten fruit trees on AMG. The aim was to establish a community orchard with free public access to any fruit that ripens. I stood in front of a small gathering of about twenty interested people and gave a speech about the project. I was performing; standing on a raised area of AMG that felt like a stage. It was also the first time I experienced the idea that digging earth in a city to plant trees can bring people together, not for monetary gain but to negotiate our ecologies and in the case of the orchard, negotiate the economies of the food we eat. May 1st 2010 might be considered the day that this thesis was conceived.

In the days leading up to the orchard planting I dug ten holes in preparation for the trees. While I dug, one regular user of AMG I know as 'John John' told me about his past and his hopes and fears and suggested ways I might improve my digging technique. John John is in his sixties and an experienced bricklayer but his education was shattered by epilepsy and he could not read and only wrote his name. Raised by foster parents within the criminal gang culture of East London, he has spent many years in jail in Argentina for drug trafficking and in Britain for offences that have not been disclosed. His face bares the scars of countless violent confrontations. One scar in particular he told me, is the result of an iron bar that was thrust through his cheek, removing nearly all his teeth. His voice is deep and resonant. His spoken language is difficult, full of obscenities and sometimes confused. He has no understanding of personal space and gets too close to strangers. His nose runs with snot and he sometimes dribbles. He adores dogs and children but his scarred features, huge battered fingers and booming voice often terrify them (my small dog loves John John because he gives him bones that are almost the same size as the dog). He

is over six feet tall and very broad and despite his poor health can still move very quickly for very short bursts of time. He is immensely strong but dug for no more than half a minute and stopped before his heart complained. He preferred to watch me dig holes and as he watched his brutal life was laid bare before me between tips on digging technique.

John John told me about countless fights and brushes with the law. Most disturbing was his admission that he had broken the legs of people 'known' to have sexually abused children. He told me he was unrepentant in court and the sympathetic judge was lenient. He made a fortune selling cocaine and his clientele included players and staff at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships. His stories were so detailed and he told them with such conviction that I had no reason to disbelieve him. I sensed he did not often have the opportunity to talk to anyone who would listen and it came pouring out. The end of each story was marked by a familiar refrain:

"Its all about the money 'Bru', its all about the money. I was rich once and I lost it all." I reply; "It's not all about the money is it? Am I digging this hole for money?" A rare silence followed. John John deliberately confused me by mixing cockney rhyming slang into his next anecdote about what he was cooking for dinner. I give him cheap tobacco bought in Belgium where I am rehearsing a show. He sells it and keeps the profit or rather bets with the profit on his one great passion in life: football. I am often invited into his lodgings for some deal or another.

John John shares a tiny bed-sitting room with a huge television, two single beds, a coffee table and a speed addict who I have seen banging his fists against a bus that was full of bewildered passengers during one tortured withdrawal. John John cooked every night for his roommate and was worried about the effects of drugs on his friend's appetite. These are the realities of everyday life for a substantial underclass in the city whose lives involve extremes of terrifying brutality and confusion but also tenderness, empathy and a need for affirmation. Looking back now, the scene in John John's bed-sitting room might have been from TLT's depiction of New York City street life in *The Connection*. Perhaps I am the equivalent of the filmmaker in the show who is trying to document the lives of drug addicts but cannot understand their addiction. I try and understand his life. When I am with John John I do not speak much nor discuss my own life. I dig and he does the talking but I do listen and record his story in my memory as knowledge of another world.

Digging in AMG offered respite from the urban madness and enabled an exchange of knowledge. In return for John John's companionship I read him the letters he received from the public bodies that supported him and wrote replies. I employed him to help with a

few local gardening and landscaping jobs I picked up to earn some cash. We dug up gardens and dug holes for drainage, fences, paving stones and wall foundations. It never went well. I did a lot of digging while 'John John' did a lot of talking. He got tired and irritable and made mistakes and shouted at me and I feared for my safety knowing what he is capable of. From very different worlds, we find each other strange and intriguing. Digging holes in the ground is something we both understand and whether doing or watching, helps us build knowledge of the place and community in which we dwell. It affirms our capabilities when precarity, uncertainty and fear are a part of our lives. The social labour of digging resists the economies of the city: the rules of the house that in different ways fail us.

From Task to Performance



Figure 1.1 (Above) Pupils from Holy Trinity School Plant an Oak Tree on AMG. Photo: The Author

The tree planting session on AMG on April 4th 2011 with pupils and teachers from Holy Trinity Primary School in Forest Hill, Southeast London (situated about 200 meters from AMG), illuminates the ways in which digging earth in an 'everyday' setting might be imagined as a performance event (Figure 1.1). This activity was not intended as practical performance research. It was an activity suggested by the head teacher of the school and facilitated by me as the Chair of the friends group responsible for the management of AMG.

The school had received an English Oak sapling donated by London Zoo but its grounds had no green areas in which to plant it. After a tour and general talk about AMG and its various habitats, each pupil had the opportunity to help complete the specified task. During the digging of the hole, all nineteen pupils took a turn to dig while the others watched and the earth was stored nearby ready to be replaced once the tree was in place. The watchers' gestures, comments, giggles, squeals and exclamations revealed that they were not just looking but engaging with the processes being performed by their peer.

The action of tree-planting is 'everyday', not in the sense that it is something the pupils might do on a daily basis, but in the sense that the action of digging or using a spade to move earth, or sand or gravel in an outdoor setting is an act of labour that might occur everyday in private gardens, graveyards, vegetable allotments or during road maintenance work or on building sites. The event was organised, not to provide entertainment or an opportunity to develop acting or dance skills but because teachers at the school could see the pedagogical value, perhaps from a scientific perspective, of spending time in a green space and planting a tree. The action exhibits a certain 'performativity' in the sense that pupils are doing or performing a structured, organised, pedagogical task designed to achieve a specified result. The everyday action of tree planting as evidenced in this photograph requires the performance of repeated actions such as digging, carrying earth on the shovel and walking between the hole and the pile of earth.

Looking back over photographic documentation of the event I was struck by the parallels both with TLT's ritualised performance of digging during *Turning The Earth* and with the improvised creation of the community garden after the show. Like the performers in *Turning The Earth* who each take a turn to dig and pass the spade to the next performer, the participants in the tree planting each take a turn to dig the hole for the tree. If the overriding task of the performers in the former is to tell the story of *Caine and Abel* for the tree planters the narrative is task-orientated and the focus of participants as evidenced in the photograph is on the materials, tools, flora and fauna, and the transactions between earth, air and water that were being performed by a community of diggers. Apart from the task of tree planting, there were no other pre-determined narratives but performing the task generated further narrative tensions that emerged during the digging and the playful nature of these tensions, along with the enduring nature of the oak tree, perhaps aligns the tree planting to the creation of the garden after *Turning The Earth*.

The arrangement of observers in relation to the person performing the action exhibits certain conventions that might be found in a theatre, dance or music performance

and is reflected in the spatial arrangement of participants in *Turning The Earth*. In both events, there is a clear delineation between watchers and 'actor' with watchers arranged around the person digging. In both events the performers each take a turn to participate in the action but they know when they are spectating and when they are acting because they have to move from the semicircle that surrounds the action, take hold of the shovel and place themselves in the centre of the group. There is no curtain to mark the beginning or end of the performance that is completed instead when the task is done. Costume in AMG is the school uniform, worn every school day, immediately confirming the social and political constituency of the group.

The location has a very different atmosphere to a theatre where the technical apparatus of lights and sound make it possible to control the audio-visual experience of the audience. In AMG light is provided by sunlight diffused through clouds that drift by and reflected off walls, trees, grass and people. There is no rehearsed and learned dialogue. Speech (not evidenced by a photograph) consists of the improvised comments of participants and teachers. Sound is provided by the 'everyday' noise of the trains passing nearby, the laughter of the pupils (visually evidenced in the photograph), aeroplanes passing overhead on the approach to Heathrow airport, the birds that share AMG and the background rumble of the city punctuated by the occasional roar of a high 'performance' motorbike passing by. Lights and sound are not carefully designed as in a theatre production but the performance is subject to the chance variations and rhythms of the ecology of the site.

Two events in particular triggered amused comments, laughter, surprise and narrative tensions among the spectators and actor: one was when the spade exposed worms; the other when the spade hit stones or bits of wood that prevented the smooth operation of the action and caused the digger to falter. The appearance of the worms initially caused screams and squeals of excitement and perhaps fear. Questions such as, "What's that?" and appalled groans of "errrrrrr.." suggested they had not previously witnessed a worm emerging pink and wriggling from the soil. I briefly explained the worms' important role in the ecology of the site and in the maintenance of healthy soil. There was subsequently a gradual decline in volume of reaction to their appearance and the occasional squeal was met with reassuring comments from peers. The action of digging subsequently slowed down with care being taken not to cut through any worms.

When the spade came up against a solid object such as a stone or piece of wood, there was an interruption in the rhythm of digging the soft earth (I loosened the soil before

the event in order to facilitate its smooth functioning and keep the event within schedule). Sometimes, the digger's foot slipped off the spade as they pressed it into the soil and met with unexpected resistance. Sometimes a hand lost its grip. The digger was thrown off balance and stumbled. These events generated reactions: giggles, ripples of laughter, gestures such as pointing and comments like, "look he can't do it". In fact the task was easily achievable by all those present but there were surprise moments of doubt caused by disruption to the rhythmical actions of digging that elicit a reaction.

The worms generated feelings of disgust and excitement that were gradually quelled. The digging human performs a task-orientated narrative that is disrupted by the collision between spade and object, creating a shared tension between the desire of the digger and the things that hinder progress. For the spectator the dramatic narrative was caused perhaps by unknown consequences: are worms safe to handle? Will the spade harm the worms? Will the digger be able to complete the task? Further drama arose out of the knowledge among the spectators that they too will have to attempt the action of digging and play their part in the narrative. When they saw a moment of disruption in the action they might consider their own position in the narrative as digger and wonder if they too will unearth worms or stumble as they work. Even if there was only one digger throughout the event and the spectators had no expectation that they would be called upon to participate they might still translate the experience of the digger into their own narrative.

The spectators are learning with the digger and their reactions evidence this flow of knowledge even if they are not actually digging themselves. Interestingly, unlike *Turning The Earth*, nearly all the verbal interventions arose from the semi-circle of watchers. The digger generally concentrated on the task and remained mute. In a theatre this dynamic would be reversed where the people on stage do most of the talking and the audience, free to react with laughter or applause for example, are usually discouraged from talking. With the tree planting there was something that intrigued me in the performer's lack of speech and the watchers' verbal interventions. It was in a sense an objectification of the performer, since photographic evidence of the event revealed the spectators were watching the non-human things: earth, spade, oak tree, worms and grass, just as much as they were watching the human performer. The performers' task orientated attention encouraged the spectator, also, to attend to the task and the materials and the signs being generated were arising from the intertwining of those materials, the tools and the performer. There was concern with the ecology of the site, the digger and the rules of the

house that emerged during the planting of a tree and that determine who is allowed to dig, when they can dig and where they can dig.

The tree-planting event helped me realise that watching someone dig could generate tensions, resonances, laughter and knowledge. The next step was to produce a digging event that was able to reproduce some of the most generative constructions in the tree-planting event. One of these constructions, emerging freely during the event itself rather than being imposed beforehand, was the rule that allowed the audience to do all the talking while the digger focussed on the task.

AMG was without a year-round water supply and many users had commented to me on the need for a pond so birds, mammals and insects would have access to drinking water, amphibians would have a place to dwell and a whole new range of flora and fauna would be able to thrive. Encouraged by my participant observation of Holy Trinity School, photographic documentation of my community digging experiences, and observation of several public events I had facilitated on AMG I tried to imagine performance constructions that would turn the pond dig into an event that draws attention to AMG and its ecologies and might encourage local residents to get involved with its care and management. At the same time I needed to earn some money and was always looking for ways of reviving and extending my professional performance practice. The moment I decided to earn money from the project my relationship to AMG and some of its users changed and I was challenged to justify my colonisation of public land for personal benefit. The economics; the rules of the house that determine who has access to the land and what happens in it were immediately foregrounded as I began a tortuous path of negotiation with local bodies, fund-raising and planning.

As I explained the project to one regular user of AMG, Kevin, he commented; “I want a pond that works. You’re just doing this to keep your flash car on the road.” I was crushed by this reflection of my own insensitivity to the situation and to the economic precarity of many of the people who dwell in AMG. Perhaps, as a child of Thatcher, I was flaunting my own enterprise and my resilience to an economic crisis that was hurting many.

It is true that the financial crisis of 2008 had impacted on my ability to earn a living and various sources of income had started to dry up. In chapter three I examine economist, John Maynard Keynes’s response to economic collapse and his (ironic) contention that paying people public money to dig through urban garbage was a better way of generating wealth than doing nothing (or at least better than waging war). My own response to

economic collapse was to turn to an action that had been a part of my life intermittently since I first played on a beach fifty years ago. I started to dig, initially not for monetary gain but just to see what it feels like to dig a hole and plant a tree. If I was a part of the entropic pecuniary economy of London, while I dug it felt like respite from the material flow and it felt like entanglement in an ecological economy of transaction between earth, air, water and people. With *Man Digs Pond*, in London in 2011 I had to argue that it was better to pay me public money to dig a pond than have me do nothing. My digging thus became entangled in the pecuniary economy of London. However, I argue in the light of my research, digging the pond as a constructed performance event also generated tensions, resonances and signs that encouraged the entanglement of a community of ecological actors around a small gesture of earth air and water that generates life, builds knowledge and develops the capability to flourish.

Man Digs Pond

London 5th November – 6th November 2011.¹⁴⁵

The audience, free to come and go during the twenty-four hour event, were invited to witness the construction of a wildlife pond rather than participate in the action of digging and they can accompany the event with songs and acoustic music of their own choosing. The encounters between audience and artist experienced during this performance and a sense that this combination of ecological action and performance had something interesting to contribute to debates about how performance can attend to ecological controversies prompted the formulation of my research question and my return to the university.

I was about to begin digging. As I prepared for the first cut the negotiations, meetings, dialogues, fund-raising and gathering of materials that I had endured in the seven months of preparation time since the tree-planting event coalesced into this moment. A friend chanted a Maori welcoming song. Another lit sparklers like footlights around the edge of the area marked out for pond construction. Iris Borgers who runs the nearby Grow Mayow Community Garden (chapter three) handed me a small bottle of whiskey. Wania Grek, in

¹⁴⁵ Video Documentation of *Man Digs Pond*, London 2011, (10') available here: <https://vimeo.com/68940812> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video A) See Appendix 3 for poster.

charge of digital documentation was late arriving and was running around in a panic to set up lights and cameras.

Standing there in a faint drizzle of rain in black 'Wellington Boots' and a hastily chosen brown suit with a matching shirt and sweater, I clutched my 'prop', a turf cutter. At that moment in time just before the first cut; a time already disappearing as the turf cutter slid into the turf; memories, histories and durations are experienced not as separate, defined events in the past but as the intertwining constituents of a continually emerging present.

My explicit intention to reproduce the verbal dynamic of the tree planting with Holy Trinity School; my intention to 'not speak' during the pond's construction immediately melted as the dozen or so audience conversed with me, asking for example; should the pond be bigger? How deep? Do I need some fish for the pond? Do I need something to eat or drink? The questions came thick and fast and focussing on the task of digging became difficult. I soon realised that without a team of helpers to do the talking for me I had to engage with the visitors. In the end their taxes were paying my wages. It would have been rude to ignore their concerned questions. My actions seemed to generate words of care and empathy. Visitors needed to talk and verbal transactions became an important part of the event.

It was a relief to finish removing turf and an impression of the pond was apparent as a black, kidney shaped 'pool' of dark earth surrounded by the lush green turf. I started digging for real. Not across the surface to remove turf, but *down* ... into what I hoped was nice damp rich dark topsoil. I took hold of the mattock that had been given to AMG by the council run initiative, Natures Gym.¹⁴⁶ My own histories of performing and digging, AMG's histories as a 'breathing space', tennis club, a farm, the site of a canal and as common land, and the audience's histories and experiences of the city all intertwined with the rhythm of digging evidenced by the thud of the mattock slicing through earth.

The publicity for *Man Digs Pond* stated that the event lasts 'for 24 hours.' I gave myself twenty-four hours to complete the task in part because, pragmatically, it was a rough estimate of how long the task would take: a necessary estimate for the purposes of scheduling, so that at least the visitors know when they might expect to experience the

¹⁴⁶ Natures Gym encourages volunteers to help out in Parks and Green spaces in the Borough in organized groups who focus on the health benefits of being outside and physical activity. Since 2009 I have overseen around a dozen work days on AMG during which rubbish and weeds are removed, pathways cleared, habitats developed and useful species introduced.

event. Twenty-four hours resonates as a familiar temporal frame representing the daily cycle of urban life that is normally broken down into rest-time, sleep-time, work-time, play-time, meal-time and so on. The audience have to decide how they will fit the event into their daily routine. Focussing on *one* task such as digging for a twenty-four hour working day resists the internal daily divisions of clock-time and the multi-tasking encouraged by contemporary urban life. Furthermore, I stated on the publicity that: "A man will not leave until a man has dug a pond" privileging the duration of the task rather than the clock, and establishing a tension between the lived experience of the pond's emergence and clock-time as the temporal frame of the event.

Two community police officers arrived to check on me as they had promised.¹⁴⁷ They insisted on doing a bit of digging but were surprisingly incompetent at the task, mixing topsoil with clay as they stumbled around with a shovel. It was supposed to be 'a man' digging the pond but many spectators wanted to help which was gratifying, yet troubling, since explaining what to do and how to do it was exhausting and time consuming. Nearly everyone wanted to talk and it seemed rude to stay mute. Many had supported the event with funds or materials or services and knew me as a neighbour. Dialogic verbal transactions became part of the experience for many visitors. Conversations were helping to explain what I was doing and why, and make it more social and inclusive but were slowing me down. I became concerned that everything was taking too long.

As I entered what the Chinese call 'ugly time'¹⁴⁸ roughly between 1am and 3am, dialogic transactions diminish in quantity but their intensity increases. A neighbour called the police in the belief I was burying a corpse. When the 'real' police (not 'community' police) arrived on site, blue lights flashing at 3.30am, I explained the event and they left after thirty seconds, apparently considering the idea of a man digging a pond to be a reasonable activity in contrast to their routine early-morning call-outs. For the neighbour who raised the alarm, the narrative suggested by digging involved the secret burial of a dead body. Human duration and its premature end were briefly signalled as the police responded to an emergency call.

¹⁴⁷ November 5th ('Bonfire Night') is their busiest night because they are asked to deal with unruly celebrations, bonfires that get out of control or fireworks that cause injury.

¹⁴⁸ 'Ugly Time', according to Chinese tradition, is the period when human energy levels are at their lowest. Folklore points to ugly time as the period during which death is most likely. The character for 'ugly', 丑, (pron. Chǒu), is the same as the character for 'clown', so 'ugly time' could also be read as 'clown time.' (source: Chinese English Dictionary, Beijing Foreign Languages Institute Press, 1985).

I leave responsibility for the choice of song and music to the visitors. As a result, there were a wide variety of songs presented during the event. Holy Trinity School choir (Figure 1.2) chose songs that have a religious, Christian theme, (3' 56"– 4' 16"). I froze when they started 'Onward Christian Soldiers', unsure how to respond. The call to religious war is not the story I wanted to tell. I stood lamely to attention with a fence post as a makeshift rifle, leaning against my shoulder (Figure 1.2). Would it have been better to use a spade? Perhaps I should have enacted a death, like the plague victims of TLT, writhing in agony in the bomb-crater pond. Instead I stood and listened and hoped the school choir would get to the end of its repertoire. I reminded myself that there are many stories to tell and I invited the local community in all its variety and shades to contribute their own story to the narratives of *Man Digs Pond*.

A contrasting contribution came from two Tamil children, whose parents own the local late night grocery store that I frequently visited. They sang a Tamil religious song that celebrates life and growth (4' 16" – 5' 48"). Nobody understood the words, but the sentiment was clear. Amateur and professional musicians sung and played. An adult choir as evidenced in the video (6' 31"– 7' 26") sung "Glorious Mud" which has a clear connection to the ecology of the pond. They also sung "John Ball", written by Sydney Carter in 1981 to commemorate the sixth hundredth anniversary of the Peasants Revolt.¹⁴⁹ Ball, a priest, was a leading figure during the revolt which to briefly summarise foregrounded the value of labouring people above the landed gentry and prescribed an egalitarian society. I was relieved to hear an alternative to the Christian message espoused by the contribution of the school choir.

My personal taste in song and music was side-lined in favour of a heterogeneous festival of contributions. There were transactions between for example the singers who offered a song and the performer who offered a pond. At times the performer stopped working to watch the musical contributions. Visitors were not immersed *into* pre-determined action and were generally not digging but they were a living part the action, contributing to its emergence in un-planned and unforeseen ways and intertwining with the earth, air and water that make up the ecology of AMG. The contributions from singers intertwined with countless dialogic transactions between participants, performers, watchers and myself. Might the event represent an Artaudian performance where the

¹⁴⁹ Bob Hudson, *John Ball* on website: Mainly Norfolk: English Folk and Other Good Music, <http://mainlynorfolk.info/john.kirkpatrick/songs/johnball.html> accessed 24 February, 2014. John Ball has since become a folk hero among literary figures, poets, musicians and visual artists with radical socialist leanings, (William Morris, Allan Ginsberg and Bob Dylan are high profile examples).

spectators are shaping the emerging action and can feel the same wind, rain and mud as The Man who is doing the digging?



Figure 1.2. (Left) During Holy Trinity School's rendition of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' as a part of *Man Digs Pond* London November 6th 2015. Photo Credit: Toy Studios

Digging for a pond suggests a very specific motivation for picking up a spade, and generates its own specific narratives among participants and witnesses. These narratives are given material form in the song and dialogic transactions that occur during construction and in the transactions between people and pond that emerge after the digging-man has gone home.

Since the pond's construction in November 2011, it has been subject to countless human interventions and undergone a series of transformations. The addition of a fresh water supply in AMG has benefited many birds, foxes and insects that can be observed drinking from the pond. Since the ponds establishment, the foxes that live in AMG have shown improved health as they no longer roam dangerous local streets at night searching for drinkable water during dry periods. While many regular human visitors to AMG expressed their doubts to me regarding the value of constructing the pond as a performance installation, those same visitors have also been active in maintaining the pond and have commented to me regularly on the new flora and fauna it has encouraged. For these regular visitors, the evolving ecosystem of the pond in the years following its construction is important although some were hostile to the matrixed performance of its construction.

John John was absent from the pond dig. We had a falling out over it. I had been concerned about the many thousands of pounds worth of video and camera equipment on site, exposed to the gangs and drunks that frequented AMG in the late hours. We would be easy pickings for anyone with a fierce dog or knife. Included in my application for funding to the Arts Council was a sum to pay someone to keep an eye out for any trouble and discourage any attempt to steal our equipment. 'John John' was the obvious choice, since he was familiar with the local gang culture and had experience of working on security at clubs. I liked the idea of sharing the Arts Council grant with someone who would never receive one directly and it gave John John an important role in the event. When I mentioned it to him, he was enthusiastic and said he would keep a pickaxe handle hidden in the trees for emergencies. This scared me. I knew he would use it. I knew how tired he would get after being up all night. I tried to negotiate and offered him the 12 hours from 8am till 8pm and this infuriated him. He stormed off screaming obscenities (heard by the whole street I later learned) and refused to play any part in the dig. This was another failure but in the years after the event he played his role in the pond's maintenance by regularly tightening the sagging rope barrier I had erected around the pond.

The continually evolving and iterative remainder of the digging that brought the pond into being has provided the subject for contemplation and motivated action in a variety of forms and for a variety of people. In February 2014 a regular user of The Green posted a photograph of newly laid frog spawn on AMG's website, entitling the post: "Wild Sex on The Green".¹⁵⁰ He might have been describing a performance of *Paradise Now* by TLT or a private party at the *Burning Man Festival*.

On 2nd and 3rd May 2013, the pond became the site of the shipwreck in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* during an open-air 'rehearsed reading' by local professional theatre group, Teatrovivo (see *Little Ecological Arts Festival – LEAF* in chapter two). The flora and fauna that have been attracted to the pond act as a focus for visitors to AMG, including Holy Trinity School who have returned to the pond for 'nature watch' (Figure 1.3).

¹⁵⁰ See Friends of AMG website: <http://www.amgfriends.org.uk/2014/02/wild-sex-on-the-green/>



Figure 1.3 (Above) Holy Trinity School, Pond Watch. Photo: The Author.

In the spring of 2012 frogspawn hatched into tadpoles that successfully developed into frogs. The tadpoles and frogs became the subjects of curiosity for many visitors to the space. During *LEAF* in May 2013 (chapter two), children seemed particularly fascinated by the tadpoles: collecting them in containers and carrying them around AMG before being asked to return them to the pond. Improvised human interventions have ranged from the removal of algae to maintenance of the surrounding rope barrier to adding oxygenating plants from local private ponds. These improvised interventions evidence the emerging relationship between humans and the ecology of AMG.

Not everyone is happy with the pond. Some argue it is too small, too shallow, in the wrong place or dangerous. Not all interventions have a beneficial effect on the pond's delicate ecosystem. I see young boys throwing bricks and rocks into the pond. I understand the pleasure of seeing the huge splashes these interventions create as rock hits water and sinks into the pond's mud, displacing water with hard stone. Water snails, frogs and flora all suffer in such circumstances. This kind of interaction represents a further way in which the pond continues to encourage ecological dialogues even if they are sometimes destructive. By spring 2015, the ravages of small children and the claws of large dogs take their toll on the lining of the pond and it is not filling up during wet weather. It quickly dries out and the copious frogspawn rots. I take this as a failure as I see the results of my labour turn into a sludgy, stinking mess. I plan my strategy for a new, more durable pond on AMG, convinced by the life, knowledge, transactions and experiences it had generated between communities of humans and non-humans that my experiment is worth a second shot

A bigger more robust pond funded by the London Borough of Lewisham was dug by me and volunteers next to the original pond in late August 2016. The desire for a new, bigger pond and the transactions between pond and people that continued after the original pond's construction evidences its potential as an enduring ecological installation. For those that witnessed its construction, there are other stories that are braided through the taskscape and a performance of social labour that can build communities and suggest strategies for digging our way out of the ecological mess.

Conclusion

Focussing on TLT's *Turning the Earth* and my own performance of *Man Digs Pond*, it is difficult to draw any methodological or formal parallels between the two performances. The former lasted about half an hour and aimed to illustrate the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel that concerns justice, violence and control of land. The aim was to educate the audience and motivate them to return land to communal ownership and free their spiritual, material and sexual lives through ritualised performance, stylised gesture and vocal incantation. The performers who psychically and physically transformed themselves were acting out the narrative of oppression. They waited their turn to dig while seated in a circle facing the action with their backs to the nearest spectators. The only contact between audience and performer was when Beck gave handfuls of earth to some spectators.

Man Digs Pond lasted 24 hours and the central narrative concerns little more than what is described in the title and there is, I argue, the space for visitors to contribute narratives and experiences. The performer appears like the 'everyday' person who dwells in a flat near the site. The transformation occurs through the landscape rather than in the performer's persona. The audience's attention is drawn away from the psychological state of the performer towards the situation, the activity of digging and the transactions between earth, air and water that constitute this transformation. Remaining as my 'everyday' persona allowed me to converse with visitors to the event in London and generate spontaneous dialogic transactions concerning digging, ponds and the specifics of AMG that would not have occurred had I been presenting a particular constructed character existing in a different psychic reality to the visitors. These transactions became an important part of the event and connected it to the place and community through which it moves. They also allowed the ordinary that Schechner misses in TLT's work to permeate through the otherworldly of scenography, lighting, ritual and song.

The differences between *Turning The Earth* and *Man Digs Pond* allow me to gauge and critically examine my practice and can be understood from two perspectives.

Firstly, the divergence in approach might be traced through contrasting developments in performance practice that emerged in the US and Europe through the seventies, eighties and nineties. The post-modern distrust of imaginary constructions of character, place and time took theatre practice towards a relationship between audience

and performer in which the two sides of the binary remain physically distinct but in equal psychic, spatial and temporal worlds. In the post modern move of theatre performance that has dominated my performance practice for the last fifteen years there is a clear distinction between the performing artist and watching spectator but there is also a sense that they are dwelling in the same heterogeneous world: a theatre, or in the case of the performance experiments I analyse in chapter one: AMG. This equality of positioning in the processes of production and reception gives rise to the emancipation that Ranci  re argues allows the spectators to translate the performance into their own experience of dwelling and life.

Secondly, in the exterior taskscapes of AMG and the vacant lot in Pittsburgh, one could situate the formal differences between *Turning The Earth* and *Man Digs Pond* in the casual conversation and experiences of digging with John John and pupils from Holy Trinity School that came before the show. The non-art context and focus on the task of digging generated knowledge of other worlds among diggers and watchers. I have evidenced in this chapter the ways that these informal digging practices fed into the performance of *Man Digs Pond*. There was a sense that I was learning with the place and community who emerged as both narrators of their stories and translators of my story. The dialogic transactions that pre-empted *Man Digs Pond* in London (and in Reims in chapter two) came for TLT *after* they had performed the show. There is a sense that, during the show TLT were speaking from a position of knowledge that was being passed from performer to spectator. The authorial voice was replaced with a scene of equal knowledge when the performers dropped their constructed personae to create a community garden.

It is not difficult to draw parallels between the creation of the garden after *Turning The Earth* and the planting of an orchard in AMG in 2010. Both were structured activities with a clear purpose and an open-ended scenario that invited spontaneous dialogic transactions and individual performances of digging as collective action to generate new life in a place of dwelling. It could be argued that ordinary conversations took up too much time during *Man Digs Pond*. The relaxed nature of the performer's interaction with the audience worked against any sense of urgency established by the fixed time frame of the performance and the difficulty of the task.

Verbal interaction with the audience removes the distance between audience and artist that Ranci  re argues gives the audience the freedom to generate their own narratives and experiences. I failed in my expressed intention to avoid speaking during the event but in the context of a public park and public funding, performing as the silent, accomplished, professional artist felt heavy handed among the economically disenfranchised who

regularly dwelled in AMG. Silence, or rather lack of speech, would have separated me from the audience and placed me in a different world to the visitor. Yet, I argue, because there was no attempt to converse as anyone other than myself, the artist and visitor engaged in dialogic transactions from an ontological position of equality and subjects of conversation ranged between ponds, AMG, digging and countless details from the lives of the visitors. In the context of the grounds of a theatre in Reims, where physical separation between audience and artist is the normal mode of creative production, I was able to restage *Man Digs Pond* as a mute performer where, like the tree planting event with school pupils described above, the people watching the digging did all the talking and their stories and experiences were woven into the story of the silent digger.

After TLT's experiences of taking theatre into the steel mills of Pittsburgh, Beck mused that he might seek a new career but his experience of digging the garden after *Turning The Earth* seems to have re-established a belief in the possibility of dwelling collectively. Perhaps Beck might have given up theatre and become a community gardener in Pittsburgh. Economic necessity forced the company back on the road where they continued to make theatre performances under the direction of Beck and Malina. It was in the creation of the garden that the company achieved what they often failed to achieve in earlier experiments with the plague and the New York City drug scene: the spontaneous, creative, playful transactions that were translated through the place of performance into the communities of audience and performer. That is not to detract from the importance of TLT's deconstruction of the audience/performer binary in the development of contemporary performance practice in general but the enclosed, exclusive and hermetic performance of *Turning The Earth* in 1975 reflects the failure of their earlier experiments to enable correspondence between audience and artist from a position of equality.

Analysis of TLT has illuminated the ways that the spatial arrangement of audience and performer can be unsettled. By the time of *Turning The Earth*, however, a defined distinction, both spatially and ontologically, between actor and audience was established. Though the performance occurred in the everyday location of a city street, the performance methods they employed were much the same as those they employed in the theatre. Performers emphasised the hardship, the exploitation and the liberating potential of the labour of digging but there was actually only a minimal amount of earth moved and carrying out the task of digging was less important than the way the digging was done. The performance could have occurred on any patch of open ground, or in a theatre with audience in seats and performers on stage. Again, I should emphasise that I am not

opposed to performance in the theatre building but in this thesis, I am interested in the ways a performance of digging can respond to the specific conditions of production and reception that run through a particular site.

The garden created with local residents after the show had an uncertain open-ended narrative with space for the specifics of the site to emerge. The separation of the show and digging the garden is emphasised by the fact that Highberger's video of the event finishes just before digging the garden began. We have to imagine the dialogic transactions and experiences it encouraged but it was an epilogue to the main action with hardly any methodological or formal consistency between the two.

While digging through the ecology of AMG with 'John John' to plant trees, 'social' labour as opposed to wage labour is negotiated through the economically wasted labour of digging holes for trees and revealed through conversations and narratives that emerge during the action. With *Man Digs Pond* in London, the economics of production, earning a living and access to public land are revealed during planning for the event but during the performance the focus is on the task of digging, the ecology of AMG and the community that move through it. Allan Kaprow's performance practice, to which the thesis now turns, also focuses on the everyday task rather than 'acting' and has illuminated the ways that the economic rules determining our everyday activities can be challenged, subverted and reassessed when a theatre of social labour inhabits, occupies or dwells in the city.

In the following chapter I explain why Kaprow (1927 – 2006), who emerged from the same New York City cultural frame as TLT, might have considered the creation of the enduring garden as the 'show' and the performance of digging that preceded it as a superfluous prologue. I also analyse the transfer of *Man Digs Pond* from AMG to the cultural infrastructure of a theatre in Reims where some of the audience are seated in chairs separated from the mute performer, watching the artist dig. However like in London they share the same space, move over the same ground and experience the same wind, rain and sun as the performer and they become a part of a theatre of social labour by for example dancing around the pond in a way that has only been possible in the theatre context as a result of the radical work of companies like TLT.

Chapter Two

The Performance of Digging and Everyday Life: Time and Social Labour.

Introduction

Part A of this chapter asks how and why Allan Kaprow resisted the artistic and economic norms of post World War Two America. I ask how the forms of his resistance to capitalism diverged from the performances of TLT. The manifestation of digging in his work is critically examined and particularly how his performance practice extended into the everyday durations of life in the city and how labour and digging in the context of creative practice helped him explore the economic conditions of life under capitalism.

The chapter traces the theoretical foundation of Kaprow's creative practice and the performance of digging during his extended performance experiment, *Trading Dirt* (1983-1986), when a bucket of earth was dug up by the artist from everyday locations and traded for earth from different sites. Initially, the chapter explores the emergence of performance in the context of visual arts practice through the 'Action Art' of Jackson Pollock in which the labour of painting is made apparent by drips and splashes of paint on the canvas. I ask how Kaprow's teacher at Columbia, art historian Meyer Schapiro, un-settled the position of the artist in the capitalised art market and encouraged Kaprow to extend the activity of art production from the studio and off the gallery wall into found environments. I examine artistic experiments with the everyday by Kaprow's other important teacher, the sound artist John Cage and two of Cages' performances: *4'33"* and *Untitled Event* (both 1952) in the context of modernism, the everyday and Antonin Artaud that is traced back to the European Avant-Garde of the early twentieth century.

Like Julian Beck of TLT, Kaprow began his career as an abstract expressionist painter in the early fifties but by the mid-1960s he had established an international reputation as the inventor and theorist of 'Happenings.' Approaching Happenings chronologically, a pattern emerges in Kaprow's career in his move away from highly mediated, constructed events towards private unannounced activities that endured over extended time spans.

Kaprow's early Happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), explores the spatial and temporal rules of art and brought the performance of the everyday task into focus. *18 Happenings* was produced in New York City while TLT were performing *The Connection* (chapter one). Actors from TLT answered Kaprow's call to help rehearse *18 Happenings* but the fact that Kaprow found it impossible to work with them illustrates the methodological divide that might be summarised by Kaprow's complaint in 1996 that; "They would want to

act; I wanted them to just do".¹⁵¹ Though geographical location, the influence of Artaud and a desire to socialise their creative practice united them, Kaprow's focus on the performance of tasks and TLT's focus on the performance of psychic transformation, meant that they would never be able to collaborate.

In order to highlight the importance of the task in both my own and Kaprow's practice the chapter contrasts two examples of Kaprow's performances in which meaning emerges between the taskscape and people through processes and transactions that highlight the social experience of labour through heterogeneous durations of time. *Fluids* was first performed in 1967 when during three days throughout the Greater Los Angeles area fifteen large room-like structures were constructed from hundreds of 50-pound ice bricks and then left to melt. *Trading Dirt* involved the digging of earth. It endured for three years during which earth was intermittently dug, transported in a bucket and then traded with earth from other locations.

If Kaprow rejected the cultural institutions of the art market, *Trading Dirt* reveals that he found refuge in the cultural institutions of academia and Zen. In the end, it was the university that provided the structures and financial support that enabled Kaprow to continue his ephemeral experiments with the everyday. Perhaps it was only in the university context that Kaprow was able to really experiment, since it brings the opportunity to propose new ways of doing and thinking and to produce knowledge rather than an object to be sold in a gallery.

Kaprow's methods, derived from the visual arts, from the avant garde and the surrealists rather than theatre practice, have illuminated the ways that the performance techniques and scenographic processes I employ in my own experiments might diverge from acting and scenography in traditional theatre contexts. Some Happenings, like *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* were highly theatrical, with performers who rehearsed for weeks and presented work to a seated audience over ninety minutes. Some, like *Fluids*, lasted days and involved structured group activities with the 'audience' consisting largely of passers-by. Others, like *Trading Dirt*, were more private, improvised interventions occurring intermittently for several years.

Performance scholar, Richard Schechner has summarised the differences between conventional theatre and the Happening.¹⁵² Plot in the theatre is replaced in Happenings by

¹⁵¹ Allan Kaprow, interview with Judith Rodenbeck, October 29, 1996, quoted in Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes, Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 2011) p. 160.

¹⁵² Richard Schechner, *Public Domain*, (New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969) p. 146.

images and events. The scripted flow of action leading to resolution in the theatre is replaced by open-ended scenarios and compartmentalised activity. Product is replaced by process. The development of roles, or what Michael Kirby describes as the 'matrixed' acting of performers who portray deliberately constructed characters that develop through time and space is countered in the events I describe in this chapter by the performer's focus instead on the carrying out of 'everyday' tasks in 'everyday' locations.¹⁵³

Kaprow has illuminated the way social interactions in a performance event can generate meaning through heterogeneous durations of activity. Within the found environment structured layers of action, such as building an icehouse, trading earth or, in my case digging a hole for a pond emerge in a constant state of flux with the emerging taskscape. The 'found' exterior location exists within the 'found' temporalities of, for example, sunrise and sunset, seasons, cloud cover, tree and plant growth as well as architectural forms (their construction and inevitable decay), the clock-time of the working day and the timings of the transport networks of the city. The everyday durations of the taskscape intertwine with the durations of a structured, temporally framed performance event.

In part B of this chapter, analysis of my own practice begins with my first practical experiment in the context of research in the academy. *Where Do We Go From Here?* was part of *The Little Ecological Arts Festival* (1st-4th May, 2013) or *LEAF* on AMG. Emerging from my readings of Kaprow, TLT and Artaud, *LEAF* might be renamed as 'Twenty Eco-Happenings in Four Days'. Rather than offering finished artworks and performances, the aim was to encourage visitors to experience processes, so most of the twenty or so events were constructed during the festival and often with the help of visitors. They were not presented chronologically, one after the other, but simultaneously, so open rehearsals of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for example might be seen or heard while experiencing the event I focus on, *Where Do We Go From Here?* during which visitors were encouraged to pick up a spade and dig to help restore a pathway through AMG. After *LEAF* neighbours who had not previously shown any interest in AMG began volunteering to help maintain the space and the pathway restoration was continued by an anonymous volunteer who laboured in secret.

Unlike Kaprow I do not reject the theatre building or the art gallery as a place to play out, negotiate and propose modes of dwelling. However, thanks to Kaprow's theorisation of the everyday, I have started seeing the theatre building or gallery space as

¹⁵³ Michael Kirby, *Happenings an Illustrated Anthology*, (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1967) p. 16.

an everyday or 'found' location like any other where ecology and economics are negotiated in the course of the everyday durations and labours of life. I examine in part B of this chapter how *Man Digs Pond* transferred from the public green space of AMG to the everyday workplace of the Comédie de Reims theatre in France (30th November 2013). In AMG transactions between regular users, neighbours and the performer contributed to the development of the project and the experience of performer and audience alike. When the performance of digging occurs in the garden of a theatre, dialogic transactions with the workers of the theatre: programme sellers, cloakroom attendants, accountants, technicians, stage managers, cleaners, caterers, creative directors and ushers all contribute to the experience of the live performance.

I ask in this chapter how the social interactions through which meanings emerge in both my own and Kaprow's performances of digging arise out of the experience of tasks or labour, the shaping of the 'taskscape' that results and the dialogic exchanges and correspondences that arise during the activity. Kaprow has illuminated my own experiments in particular because of his theorisation, through artistic practice and scholarly writing, of the temporal experience of contemporary life and particularly the 'everyday' durations of work-time, clock-time, rest-time and leisure-time that under-pin the temporal and spatial logic of capitalism and form what Kaprow calls the "subtle social complex"¹⁵⁴ in which we dwell.

¹⁵⁴ Allan Kaprow, 'Should the Artist Be a Man of the World', *Art News*, (1964): 35. Quoted in Robert E. Haywood, 'Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art', in Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, Events, Objects, Documents* (New York, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University; 1999) p. 37.

Part A - Critical Case Study

Allan Kaprow, Happenings and the Everyday Durations of Dwelling: Digging as Social Labour and Performing Economics

The Labour of Painting and the Performance of Art

Kaprow was part of what Benjamin Buchloh and Judith Rodenbeck describe as a “radical reorientation of advanced aesthetic practices”¹⁵⁵ that occurred in America in the decade between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s. Faced with the repressions of McCarthy’s anti Communist purges, visual artists looked to build on the radical individualism of abstract expressionism that had been critically acclaimed in the pre-war and immediate post-war period. Embracing abstract expressionism but searching for a more social alternative, at Columbia University art historian Meyer Schapiro and his student Kaprow negotiated a path through the eddies of institutional anti-Communism while launching what Robert Haywood describes as “ ... a vigorous protest against ... the modern artist’s blind seduction by capitalism’s rhetoric of freedom.”¹⁵⁶ For Schapiro art that concerned itself only with spectacle and novel sensation lost its social function and potential to initiate change by its

¹⁵⁵ Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday*, p.1.

¹⁵⁶ Robert E. Haywood, ‘Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro’s and Allan Kaprow’s Theory of Avant-Garde Art’, in Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday* p. 37.

commodification in the speculative economy of the art market. The artist working alone in the studio had the impression of being free to do what he or she wanted. In reality the market forces at work within the structures of the art gallery culture constrained the artist's freedom and limited art's potential to offer a critique of those forces.

Schapiro's critique of capitalism centres on the division of labour encouraged by mass, industrialised production where "Standardised objects establish no bond between maker and user. They are mechanical products with only a passing or instrumental value."¹⁵⁷ Schapiro's resistance to instrumental labour echoes Marx's critique of the alienation of the worker and centred on a re-positioning of the artist's relationship to his or her medium. The 'drip paintings' of Jackson Pollock epitomised the abstract expressionists' concern with visual art that made manifest and celebrated the labour-time of painting.

The 'action art' of expressionist painters like Pollock privileges process, in which the act, performance, experience or labour of composition is traced in the splashes and drips of paint, inducing what Judith Rodenbeck describes as a complex, enduring and empathetic response in the viewer.¹⁵⁸ Art critic, Harold Rosenberg concluded in 1959 that the drip painting was "... an arena in which to act ... not a picture but an event."¹⁵⁹ For Kaprow, (who echoes Rosenberg when he says of his days as a painter; "I thought of the large canvas as an arena"¹⁶⁰) the canvas, no matter how large, limited the painter to the fixed frame of the painting and the socio-economic frame of the art gallery culture: "... the reason I stopped painting was because it was like the theatre, ... It's pretty comfortable working in the middle, but as soon as you get to the edges you have to stop; and I didn't feel like stopping. So I simply gave up the whole idea of making pictures as figurative metaphors for extensions in time and space."¹⁶¹ It is ironic that a thesis that explores performance practice can find insight in the work of a visual artist who resisted painting 'because it was like the theatre', yet Kaprow's resistance to the theatre lay in the theatre building rather than the activity of performance. Once the edges of the theatre are overcome and creative activity extends into the 'everyday', then the distinctions between art and life or between acting and the everyday 'act' are blurred.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted from Schapiro, Meyer, *The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art*, Art News, 1957 in Robert E. Haywood, 'Critique of Instrumental Labor', p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ Judith F Rodenbeck, 'Foil: Allan Kaprow Before Photography', in Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday*, p.47.

¹⁵⁹ Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, (New York, Horizon Press, 1959) p. 40. Quoted in Nick Kaye, *Site Specific Art*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2000), p. 107.

¹⁶⁰ Allan Kaprow 'Extensions in Time and Space, An Interview with Allan Kaprow' by Richard Schechner, in Sanford (ed), *Happenings and Other Acts*, p. 224.

¹⁶¹ Kaprow, 'Extensions in Time and Space', p. 224.

An art without edges meant taking it into the environments of contemporary life and exposing it to the chance durations of the 'everyday'. But as Richard Schechner says of Kaprow, "to find and then use indeterminate space he had first to understand time. A space without edges must take time: become active."¹⁶² To help him understand how the experience of time can operate in performance events Kaprow turned to the sound compositions of John Cage who welcomed into his creative practice the 'chancy' and 'noisy' durations, tasks and rituals of everyday life. As Cage wrote in 1937, after study with Schoenberg and a brief period at art school; "wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise ... Whether the sound of a truck at 50 mph, rain, or static between radio stations, we find noise fascinating."¹⁶³ Cage's writing came to mind during the digging experiment *Where Do We Go From Here?* (part B of this chapter). A participant is distracted from the drama of struggling to dig with tools that are difficult to handle when an express train rushes past twenty meters away. From the opposite direction text from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is heard and intertwines with the digging. Though the only audience for the digger was his father and my camera, during those chance collisions birdsong, an ordinary train, play, *The Tempest* and the labour of digging create ephemeral dramas that are experienced through time and space.

Artaud and John Cage – Space, Time and The Chance Durations of The Everyday

This section is an opportunity to analyse some of the foundational performance practices that have informed my own experiments. The studio practice of Cage and Kaprow has influenced the final presentation of practice in the studio at Birkbeck as a part of the *viva voce* examination. The aim of my experiments elides with both Cage and Kaprow in the desire to engage with the everyday durations of dwelling in the city. I ask here how Artaud's common influence on TLT and Kaprow has resulted in such divergent performances of digging.

For Artaud, the realities of the subconscious, of dreams and nightmares, magic, ritual and poetic imagination were the realities that only a "total theatre"¹⁶⁴ was capable of

¹⁶² Richard Schechner, 'Negotiations with Environment' (1968) in Schechner, *Public Domain*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969) p. 181.

¹⁶³ Quoted from John Cage's manifesto, 'The Future of Music', in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p.123.

¹⁶⁴ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 66.

giving form to, “through its physical aspect and because it requires *spatial expression*”¹⁶⁵. It is not only Artaud’s theorisation of performance space that concerns me again but also its activation by sound for, as John Cage and Julian Beck noted, Artaud called not only for an un-settling of the traditional spatial relationship between audience and performer but also for the consideration of sound, action and lighting as functioning primarily to galvanise the place of performance and the people who dwell in it. Artaud had a vision of the architectural structures and spatial relationships between audience and actors his new theatre required:

Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it.

... The auditorium will be enclosed within four walls stripped of any ornament, with the audience seated below, in the middle, on swivelling chairs allowing them to follow the show taking place around them. ... The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations.¹⁶⁶

Amplified sound and intricate lighting effects are to be employed to further enliven the space allowing the action’s “direct, immediate hold on the spectators”.¹⁶⁷ Thunder, wind and storms were not to be considered as effects used to illustrate a narrative on stage but rather weather encircled the audience and was experienced by actor and audience to the same ‘cruel’ degree. It’s easy to see how weather is experienced by actor and audience alike if, like my own experiments and like *Turning The Earth*, the performance takes place in the open air. The struggle for TLT was to achieve this unifying experience in theatre buildings that had been designed to emphasise a clear distinction between the stage and the auditorium.

Artaud’s influence can be traced from the early Happenings of John Cage at Black Mountain College in 1952, via Mary Caroline Richards and her translation of *The Theatre and Its Double*, through to Kaprow’s early Happening, *18 Happenings in Six Parts*. Richards began the first English translation of *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1952 while working as the registrar at Black Mountain College.¹⁶⁸ She read her own poetry in Cage’s 1952 *Untitled Event* at the college.¹⁶⁹ Reading Cage’s description of the way space is used in *Untitled*

¹⁶⁵ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁹ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 101.

Event it seems clear that Richards had shown some of her translation to Cage. The audience were seated in the centre of the space, arranged in four triangles with 'furrows' between the triangles. Action was dispersed throughout the space and through the furrows separating the triangles. It is worth quoting Cage's own description of the event to show the clear link between Artaud's vision of a performance space as quoted above and Cage's interpretation of that vision.

[The audience was seated] in four isometric triangular sections, the apexes of which touched a small square performance area. ... Disparate activities, dancing by Merce Cunningham, the exhibition of paintings and the playing of a Victrola by Robert Rauschenburg, Charles Olsen reading his poetry, or M.C. Richards, atop a ladder, reading hers ... the piano playing of David Tudor, my own reading of a lecture that included silences ... all took place within chance-determined periods of time.¹⁷⁰

Cage was not only interested in the spatial position of audience and performer but also in the way multiple images and actions could move simultaneously through the space, using sound and action to activate the whole landscape of the performance space. After *Untitled Event* Cage spoke about Artaud opening the possibility that theatre could have no text or that text could act independently from action or sound.¹⁷¹ Artaud did not reject speech but one important trajectory of his thinking lies in the rejection of a literary approach to theatre: " ... instead of harking back to texts regarded as sacred and definitive, we must first break theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of unique language some-where in between gesture and thought."¹⁷² Artaud saw the potential of speech as a "*spatial expression*" (italics original) existing as a means of activating the space, "like renewed exorcisms."¹⁷³ Artaud's theatre extends language from words into space, acting on our senses through "dissociatory, vibratory action."¹⁷⁴

What form might this spatial re-invention of theatrical speech take? Artaud calls for "Shouts, groans ... vocal, incantational beauty, attractive harmonies, rare musical notes."¹⁷⁵ He does not do away with dialogue but rather proposes that words should have, "something of the significance they have in dreams".¹⁷⁶ In dreams anything is possible making it impossible to pinpoint any particular style of delivery. TLT's *Turning The Earth* had plenty of shouts and groans and poetic language that reflect Artaud's call for a theatre

¹⁷⁰ John Cage, quoted by Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 99.

¹⁷¹ Rodenbeck. *Radical Prototypes*, pp. 155 - 156.

¹⁷² Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 68.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

language that rejected traditions of naturalism in order to realise a heterogeneous “subsidiary exaggeration of speech”.¹⁷⁷

Writing in 1965, Kirby argued that some Happenings, “are the best examples of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty that have yet been produced.”¹⁷⁸ Schechner understands perception in Happenings as a complex relationship between the sender, the message, and the receiver, whereas he sees Artaud’s interest in shock and cruelty as a focus on the revolutionary message as the central concern.¹⁷⁹ Whatever the differences in approach the influence of Artaud can be traced in Cage’s 1952 ground breaking early Happening through Kaprow’s extensions of performance through time and space, to *Man Digs Pond* in London when the sounds of the city combine with the rhythms of digging, birdsong, weather, conversations, music and song and are experienced by artists and audience to the same ‘cruel’ degree. It is analysis of the foundational work of Artaud, Pollock, Cage and Kaprow that has illuminated the value of multiplicity.

Kaprow saw Cage’s seminal work *4’33”* in 1952 when the windows in an auditorium were opened to let in the sounds of a city while a performer, David Tudor, sat at a piano on stage with arms moving above the keys but played nothing.¹⁸⁰ This work typified Cage’s approach to duration by countering the expressive beats, rhythms or timings of traditional music in favour of the chance durations of the urban taskscape heard through the open windows when “a police car came by with its siren running.”¹⁸¹ Time was experienced as the chance, ‘ready made’ or ‘found’ durations of the contemporary urban landscape in juxtaposition to the regulated and ‘ready made’ clock time of the performance highlighted by the use of a stop-watch by the performer to keep the performance within four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Like the more intricately constructed of Cage’s works like *Untitled Event*, clock time is acknowledged as a framing and scheduling temporality of the performance while heterogeneous durations of the city offer a counterpoint to notions of both musical time and clock-time.

In *Untitled Event* at Black Mountain College a few months after *4’33”* projections, music, dance, poetry, radio, white paintings by abstract expressionist Claus Oldenburg and a lecture on Zen Buddhism by Cage fill the audio-visual landscape of the arena. Cage’s long-term collaborator, choreographer Merce Cunningham, moved through the aisles between

¹⁷⁷ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁸ Kirby, ‘Happenings: An Introduction’, p. 22.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Schechner, ‘Happenings’ in Sandford (ed), *Happenings and Other Acts*, p. 217.

¹⁸⁰ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 123.

¹⁸¹ Allan Kaprow, in George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 188-189. Quoted in Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 123.

the seated audience while being chased by an excited dog. There was no rehearsal but just before the performance began performers received "... a 'score' which indicated 'time brackets' only and each was expected to fill out privately moments of action, inaction and silence as indicated on the score,"¹⁸² In one action, performed by David Tudor, water was repeatedly poured from one bucket to another and back again: a seemingly pointless task, given meaning by its audio and visual duration and its juxtaposition with the other images, actions and sounds occurring simultaneously. The physical action of pouring water varies in duration according to the physical demands of the task such as the precise angle at which the pouring bucket is held.

Perhaps Cage was pre-empting or inventing the Happenings of Kaprow when he stated that any meanings "that happened ... happened in the observer himself."¹⁸³ This is a key notion of the way the audience receive the actions, images and sounds of Cage's work and my own performance practice. Reception is dependant on many variables such as the angle of the audience member's head at any particular moment, their seating (or standing) position, or whether they turned their heads in response to audio or visual stimuli. Each audience member receives different signs and has a unique experience of the event that is dependant on chance and the choices made. Yet conversely this event also worked against chance in its adherence to a strict time notation. Meanings are generated therefore in the complex intertwining of regulated clock-time (and other defined structures such as the seating arrangement) with chance durations, such as the audience's precise reception of collisions of action, sound and image. These experiments with time and the performance of tasks have helped me formulate the presentation of digging at the *viva voce* examination which will involve simultaneous, heterogeneous presentations of digging that the audience are free to experience in their own time. In part B of this chapter I ask how visitors to *The Little Ecological Arts Festival* are invited to dig earth to restore a pathway while around them other performances; sculpture, poetry and theatre are emerging.

Untitled Event had the effect of varying the individual audience's experience of time. Rodenbeck notes that audience members had a wildly varied experience of the duration of the event; "some believed the event went on for two hours while others at the same event stated that it lasted exactly forty-five minutes."¹⁸⁴ For the performers, clock-time functioned as the readymade structure on which the assemblage of environments operated. Mary Caroline Richards describes how clock time regulated her performance, but

¹⁸² Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p.126.

¹⁸³ Noted by a student of Cage's, Francine Duplessix-Gray, quoted in Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p.126.

¹⁸⁴ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 100.

her uncertainty over the temporal instructions she received suggests the collisions between heterogeneous and constructed temporalities that *Untitled Event* embodied; “As we came in, we were given a piece of paper that had the time on it – 32” or 4’00” – for those of us who were performing, but how I knew what that time was, I can’t remember.”¹⁸⁵

Clock time in 4’33” and *Untitled Event* is negotiated as both an arbitrary structuring frame and as a reference to the determining temporal frames of work, rest and leisure time that determine ways of dwelling in the contemporary city. Rodenbeck describes the structuring device of clock-time as it is used in Cage’s work as opposed to musical or expressive time as a “fundamentally twentieth-century phenomenon, for historically one aspect of the shift to modernity was marked by the change of time and its regulation from church time and agrarian time to clocked and arbitrarily regulated time.”¹⁸⁶ Rodenbeck is referring here to the time it takes to dig the earth and sow crops according to the durations of weather and seasons in contrast to the regulated clock time of the modern production line where the working day consists of repeated un-skilled activity. In the juxtaposition of regulated clock-time to the everyday durations of contemporary life that are manifested in Cage’s work, Allan Kaprow saw a rich vein of creative possibility that was to concern him for the rest of his life.

The Avant Garde and 18 Happenings in 6 Parts

For Kaprow, the visual artist, the ‘noise’ that Cage welcomed into his sound work was found in the landscape of the everyday situation where it was received as “a metaphor of everything excluded from art.”¹⁸⁷ The ‘chance’ and ‘noise’ were “given(s) of the environment once you left the art context”.¹⁸⁸ For Kaprow, the only way to engage with the noise and chance that Cage promoted, was to take art out of the cultural institutions that framed them. As Kaprow sates; “Cage brought the chancy and noisy world into the concert hall (following Duchamp, who did the same in the art gallery), a next step was simply to move right out into that uncertain world and forget the framing devices of concert hall, gallery, stage, and so forth. This was the theoretical foundation of the Happening ... ”.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Quoted from William Fetterman, ‘John Cage’s Theatre Pieces’, *Contemporary Music Studies*, 11. (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), in Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁶ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 102.

¹⁸⁷ Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 224.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 225.

Kaprow studied musical composition with Cage from 1956 to 1958 at the New School in New York¹⁹⁰ and acknowledges the influence of Cage on much of the material of *16 Happenings* (1959). However, Kaprow prefers to locate the germination of his work in the movements of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism of the early 20th Century:

... the direct line of historical stimulation (usually conscious) seems to have been the Futurist manifestos and noise concerts, Dada's chance experiments and occasional cabaret performances, Surrealism's interest in automatic drawing and poetry, and the extension of these into action painting.¹⁹¹

There is a long and complex path from the collage effects of dance, sound, text, object and image that these movements embraced, through to the Happenings and later works by Kaprow. Kirby sees in Dada the origins of the move towards "nonmatrixed performing"¹⁹² that came to be associated, not only with Dada and Kaprow but with countless performance artists and theatre companies, including Forced Entertainment, that have traced experimental performance practice into the twenty first century. Their shared concern is to challenge distinctions between performing and not performing, artist and public, art object and everyday object and gallery space or theatre and city-street.

The historical precedent of Happenings in the 'everyday' is found in Dada's use of found objects and found environments and their "Methodical use of Chance method, ... the movement's name itself was chosen by chance from a German-French dictionary."¹⁹³ Kirby describes Dada performances organised by André Breton in April 1921 that occurred in the found environments of the garden of a church, a courtyard behind a public urinal and Saint-Lazare station.¹⁹⁴ In these environments performers and members of the public met in the streets rather than concert halls, theatres and exhibition spaces. The objects or props used in Dada performances were everyday items. In a performance described by Kirby as "a ballet with Dada additions"¹⁹⁵ 196: *Relache* by Francis Picabia with a score by Erik Satie, performed in Paris in 1924, a man downstage like in Cage's *Untitled Event* thirty years later,

¹⁹⁰ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', p. 19.

¹⁹¹ Allan Kaprow, 'In Response, A Letter from Allan Kaprow,' in Sandford, (ed), *Happenings and Other Acts*, p. 219.

¹⁹² Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', p. 17.

¹⁹³ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', p. 22.

¹⁹⁴ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', pp. 17-18.

¹⁹⁵ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', p.18.

“constantly poured water from one bucket to another.”¹⁹⁷ Yet it was their visual art rather than performances that drew Kaprow to Dada.

In *Essays On The Blurring Of Art and Life* Kaprow notes the appropriation of the everyday object by Marcel Duchamp and its challenge to the norms of the art gallery culture. Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) for example; a real urinal lying on its back on a plinth, takes the everyday object of a urinal and gives it new meaning as a fountain perhaps or a ‘dead’ urinal or a symbol of the failures of traditional art or a joke. According to Kaprow “Duchamp picked up ... the ironic possibility that the artist’s selective appropriation of commonplace materials and mass-produced images might replace the artist’s traditional skill and individual creativity.”¹⁹⁸ Kaprow saw in the Dadaists a challenge to the self-perpetuating authority represented by the culture of the fine art academy. For Kaprow, the art-gallery culture, within which many of the Dadaists operated, removed the everyday object from its everyday setting and embedded it in the fine art culture it sought to critique. His answer was to socialise his work: to take art into the everyday environments and durations of the contemporary world.

Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was, according to Rodenbeck, “clearly inspired by the work of Kaprow’s sometime mentor, the experimental composer John Cage”.¹⁹⁹ It was perhaps the chance operations of reception that allied *18 Happenings* to Cage’s work in the sense that audience members received different signs and stimuli according to variables such as the positioning of an individual audience member’s seat and the location of attention at any particular moment. Yet the complexity of *18 Happenings* and its apparently chance operations of routine activity were in fact carefully rehearsed, planned and subject to a rigorously timed sequencing.²⁰⁰ Ringing bells signalled the end of the sections when the audience were obliged to move seats under strict instruction.

Kaprow’s experiential, task orientated aesthetic was apparent in the invitation he issued to *18 Happenings* in a loft in New York in 1959; “you will become a part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them”.²⁰¹ The eighteen different happenings, carefully rehearsed²⁰² to be shown over ninety minutes during choreographed and tightly structured layers of sequential and simultaneous action interspersed with

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p.223.

¹⁹⁹ Rodenbeck, ‘Foil: Allan Kaprow Before Photography’, p.55.

²⁰⁰ Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p.130.

²⁰¹ Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p.130.

²⁰² Kirby, *Happenings an Illustrated Anthology*, p. 75.

extended breaks, negotiated meaning through the juxtapositions and dialogues between durations of fragmented actions, texts, images and music. Kaprow's purpose was clear; the happening was not to be watched for ninety minutes but to be experienced through the time of a live performance.

The experience of time is foregrounded during one sequence of this early Happening when two performers read from hand-held placards: "it is said that time is essence ... we have known time ... spiritually ... as expectation, remembrance, revelation and projection, abstracting the moment from its very self."²⁰³ Here, time is negotiated as 'essence', suggesting both its critical importance as in the phrase 'time is of the essence' and perhaps the intrinsic role of time in a Happening. To have 'known time' is a bold claim but the past tense suggests this knowledge is fleeting and difficult to grasp. The sequence continued: "... we remark-that it is, after all, simple to tell time. We have designed the clock ... yes ..." then, "A ... word ... about ...clocks ...".²⁰⁴ The sequence ends with the sound of a bell, perhaps the bell of an alarm clock and the performers who had been reading the placards stood silently before walking away from the audience. Here the difficulty of understanding experienced time as expectation, remembrance or projection as abstracted from the present moment, is contrasted with the ease with which we are able to relate to the clock, to 'tell the time' and to regulate action accordingly. The scene sets up a paradox that was to continue to inform Kaprow's work throughout his life and I argue is given form in my own practice. On the one hand we are subject to chance meetings and events that are experienced through the heterogeneous durations of for example sunrise and sunset, weather patterns, memories, expectations and projections. On the other hand, contemporary life and the processes of work, travel and leisure compel us to regulate our lives in more or less strict adherence to the homogenous time of the clock. In this paradox lies the germ of Kaprow's resistance to the political and economic structures that regulated the life of an artist in the capitalised economy of post-war America.

The word 'everyday' itself suggests a particular duration, an open ended, diurnal rhythm that has been, and will be, repeated on a daily basis. Who can say when the everyday rhythms of eating, sleeping, resting and working were first experienced or when they will end? In their multiple and simultaneous durations occurring in the context of a performance event they create, in the words of Schechner, "that special kind of time

²⁰³ Kirby, *Happenings an Illustrated Anthology*, p. 74.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

cluster,”²⁰⁵ in which time is perceived as a heterogeneous flow during which the processes of dwelling are experienced as durations that celebrate “the full ‘message-complexity’ of a downtown street.”²⁰⁶ The ‘multi-media’ complexity of Cages *Untitled Event* was reflected in Kaprow’s early Happenings and especially in *18 Happenings*. Kaprow acknowledges that his first Happenings occurred in Cage’s classroom.²⁰⁷ Cage’s teachings followed a path that Kaprow had already established for himself after the realisation that Pollock’s paintings, “led not to more painting, but to *more action*.”²⁰⁸ The noise and chance that Cage welcomed into his work was particularly interesting to Kaprow. Yet Kaprow also admits that he learned things “... which Cage was not inclined to teach.”²⁰⁹ As Kaprow’s work progressed through the 1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s, he became less concerned with strict time notations, rehearsed activities, and manipulations of the audience’s experience by the artist’s instructions. Cage maintained his position as an artist within the frame of the concert hall but Kaprow’s work gradually dissolved the distance between art and life by taking art into our everyday dwelling places.

For Kaprow, it was as if the audience for *4’33”* had climbed out of the open windows of the concert hall and watched the police car that had been so audibly present to the audience that was seated in the auditorium. By the mid-sixties there was no audience, in the traditional sense in Kaprow’s work but rather he called for an art of experience in which ‘visitors’ as he began to call them, interpret the meanings of life through the experience or the durations of “consciousness and communal exchange”²¹⁰ that shape the everyday experiences of dwelling in the city.

By 1966, Kaprow had theorised his conception of ‘real’ time after Bergson as “... ‘experienced’ time, as distinct from conceptual time.”²¹¹ Kaprow recognised that ‘experienced time’ involves action; at a happening, things happen, and it is through activity that the heterogeneity of real time is revealed; “All of us know how, when we are busy, time accelerates, and how, conversely, when we are bored it can drag almost to a standstill. Real time is always connected with doing something, with an event of some kind, and so is

²⁰⁵ Richard Schechner, ‘Negotiations with Environment’ (1968) in Schechner, *Public Domain*, p. 187.

²⁰⁶ Schechner, ‘Happenings’, p. 217.

²⁰⁷ Kaprow, ‘In Response, A Letter from Allan Kaprow,’ p. 220.

²⁰⁸ Kaprow, ‘In Response, A Letter from Allan Kaprow,’ p. 220.

²⁰⁹ Kaprow, ‘In Response, A Letter from Allan Kaprow,’ p. 220.

²¹⁰ Jeff Kelley, ‘Introduction’ (1992), in Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. xiv.

²¹¹ Allan Kaprow, ‘Excerpts from ‘Assemblages, Environments & Happenings’, in Sanford (ed), *Happenings and Other Acts*, p. 237.

bound up with things and spaces.”²¹² But Kaprow also saw regulated, homogenous ‘clock-time’ as a distinct and real duration that can be experienced in the context of a Happening.

If real time, Kaprow wrote in 1966, “conforms to the clock used in the Happening ... that is legitimate, but if it does not because a clock is not needed, that is equally legitimate.”²¹³ Though clock times often provided the temporal frame of a Happening, allowing participants, audience and artists to coordinate the production and reception of activities, many were open-ended allowing individuals to decide when they would participate over the course of several days, months or years. Kaprow even considered the idea of the ‘endless’ happening which would “ ... apparently transcend palpable time - such as the slow decomposition of a mountain of sandstone ... ”.²¹⁴ Is such a performance desirable or even a practical possibility? Perhaps neither, for in the final analysis it is the ephemerality of Kaprow’s work; the time it takes to be finished, that resonates most strongly with the accelerating processes of mass production, consumption and planned obsolescence, where no sooner than an object is created, it is consumed, destroyed and replaced with a newer version. This chapter will examine two of Kaprow’s events that employ the experience of time in markedly contrasting ways through social exchanges that negotiate meaning through the intertwining of constructed durations of production and consumption within the ‘found’ durations of the city.

Fluids – Duration, Labour and Wasting Time

Fluids was first performed in November 1967 when on roadsides throughout the Greater Los Angeles area fifteen rectangular structures measuring thirty feet long by ten feet wide and eight feet tall were constructed by volunteer participants from 650 ice bricks, each one weighing fifty pounds (22.5kg).²¹⁵ The ice bricks were glued together using rock salt that causes the ice to melt and fuse together. The viewer could observe the activity of the icehouse construction and witness the ice melting in the warm October weather and then finally the melted ice evaporating, leaving nothing.

The significance of the structures’ minimalist form lies perhaps in its lack of significance. As Kaprow states, “In fact, their very blankness and their rapid deterioration

²¹² Kaprow, ‘Excerpts from ‘Assemblages, Environments & Happenings’, p. 237.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Kaprow, ‘Excerpts from ‘Assemblages, Environments & Happenings’, p. 238.

²¹⁵ Kaprow, ‘Extensions in Time and Space’, p. 223.

proclaims the opposite of significance.”²¹⁶ That does not mean that the structures’ form is without meaning but that the meanings flowing between the spectator, site, materials and activity are negotiated through an ephemerality that is highlighted by the activity and duration of construction and especially the duration of melting ice.

The labour and durations of *Fluids* differs markedly from the labour of *Man Digs Pond* in a variety of interesting ways. The construction of each ice room was undertaken by teams of between ten and fifteen, with Kaprow moving between each site and helping with the work, whereas despite the insistence of some visitors, digging in *Man Digs Pond* was generally a solo task. In terms of engineering digging a pond is not a precise activity in the sense that a centimetre difference in the shape of a pond will not alter its function or durability. The labour in *Fluids* required some engineering and physical skills to handle the ice blocks safely. The walls had to be marked out precisely and built vertically so they would not collapse as they got higher.²¹⁷ As a social process, therefore, *Fluids* offered the potential for many interactions that were necessitated by the complexity and precision of the task. The logistics of selecting sites, acquiring permissions, assembling fifteen teams of builders and organising regular deliveries of ice blocks every two hours was handled primarily by the Pasadena Art Museum who commissioned the work.²¹⁸ The rules of the game were clear, yet these processes involved dialogic interactions through time between participants, ice-truck drivers, passers-by and Kaprow that varied according to factors such as the size and skill of the team, the location, the weather and the promptness of the ice deliveries.

According to Jeff Kelley, it was the social nature of the task, “that proved to be the most interesting variable to Kaprow.”²¹⁹ Would leaders emerge? Would the various activities be allocated according to gender? Would new friendships or groups be forged? How would the rules be negotiated? All these questions are attended to by participants through social interactions that are shaped by the specifics of each site and give meaning to the experience of performing the clearly defined task. Yet there is one more important difference between the labour of digging a hole for a pond and the labour of constructing an ice room. The pond is designed to endure for years but the ice room was already melting as it was being built and would disappear within 24 hours. If the purpose of labour in *Man Digs Pond* is clear (to leave a durable mark on the landscape), the ephemeral ice room was

²¹⁶ Kaprow, ‘Extensions in Time and Space’, p. 223.

²¹⁷ Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay the Art of Allan Kaprow*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2004), p. 121.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 123.

perhaps a 'waste' of time and the result of 'meaningless work.' The duration of labour is made apparent in *Fluids* by the knowledge among the participants that the result of their labour will soon vanish. As Kelley asks of *Fluids*: "Were their friendships, forged in an experience of common purposelessness, as temporal and fluid as the object of their shared labor?"²²⁰ The duration of *Fluids* set it apart from conventional notions of labour and accomplishment. Though the work was undertaken seriously and with a clear purpose, the indifference to conventional notions of achievement and commodification created tensions between the activity and onlookers.

There were some spectators who were offended by the ephemerality of the ice structures, seeing in the playful labour of the volunteer art student participants a mimicking or mockery of labour as 'real' work. For example, one of the icehouses was built in the grounds of a brick manufacturer, 'La Canada Rustic Stone.'²²¹ According to Kelley one of the older brick-workers at the site had spent his working life stacking bricks in order to support his family and pay for his children's college education. He took offence at the art students building structures that would soon disappear. "Their so-called work would evaporate in the sun and be gone the next day, while his would always be there, waiting to be stacked and unstacked. ... It's easy to see how the near abutment of the real work and the play work could only have been interpreted as a slap in the face by a man for whom manual labor was neither a recreational option nor a communal ideal."²²² If Kaprow was attempting in *Fluids* a "... funny as hell, and absurd"²²³ parody of urban planning and planned obsolescence, the joke backfired when confronted by the reality of spending decades stacking bricks for a living. Yet in this friction between the labour of 'real' work and 'play' work the experience of the working day durations of life in the city are negotiated through emerging and unplanned narratives.

Schechner sees in *Fluids* a critique of ownership, monumental architecture and private property; "Here we are, ... a terribly property-conscious country with people who want to own everything. But plainly ice in sunlight is something that can neither be possessed nor preserved. And if you build a monument that immediately deteriorates, you are running against the American grain."²²⁴ Kaprow sees in the fifteen repetitions of the work over three days a comment on planned obsolescence, mass production, and seriality. The ephemerality and multiplicity of the structures representing the durational essence of

²²⁰ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 123.

²²¹ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 125.

²²² Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 223.

²²³ Kaprow, 'Extensions in Time and Space', p. 224.

²²⁴ Schechner, 'Extensions in Time and Space, An Interview with Allan Kaprow', p. 223.

economic life under capitalism, "within which everything quickly grinds down only to be replaced by something else".²²⁵ In this sense, and in its negotiation of the durations of planning, production and distribution, *Fluids* moved closer than earlier happenings such as *18 Happenings*, to a reflection of the everyday working practices of contemporary life. Yet in its indifference to traditional notions of accomplishment, it offered a critique of capitalist notions of production and success. As Robert Haywood suggests, *Fluids* gave form to Schapiro's social philosophy of art and his critique of instrumental labour: "In conceptually nuanced and formally innovative ways, Kaprow's *Fluids* ... registered a protest against the single, generative principle that keeps capitalist culture in motion: above all else, maximize profit."²²⁶

Kelley describes some of the social exchanges that *Fluids* encouraged. The "initially hostile" ice delivery drivers donated crates of beer to the workers. A policeman threw several flares into one ice structure, creating a "gaseous pink light that radiated in the early evening sky."²²⁷ Kelley notes that these unintended contributions reflected a central paradox of Kaprow's work during the late 1960s and early 1970s: "although happenings were experimental forms of art, they also tended to yield traditional, if unconventional, experiences."²²⁸ Traditional in the sense that they explored, through their location alongside the everyday activities of transporting ice and labour, "a series of physical, social, and communal experiences"²²⁹ that, perhaps, harked back to a preindustrial time, or at least to a pre-mechanised time when practices of agriculture, construction and production involved social and material exchange, rather than the solitary operation of equipment and instrumental labour.

Though the event requires extensive planning, scheduling and coordination between participants and the delivery of materials, the action of construction and the melting ice itself is not shaped by clock-time. Rather, the event takes 'its own time' or as Schechner concludes, "time takes its shape from the events"²³⁰ and from the chance interactions and flow between the structure, the people and the everyday environments of Los Angeles.

²²⁵ Kaprow, 'Extensions in Time and Space', p. 223.

²²⁶ Robert E. Haywood, 'Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art', in Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday*, p. 44.

²²⁷ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 125.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Schechner, 'Extensions in Time and Space', p. 222.

While Happenings were achieving ever greater heights of mass-media coverage and interest in academic and visual art circles, Kaprow's rejection of the trappings of the capitalised art market led him to become more focused on private, ephemeral encounters in which the media spotlight and mass participation were reduced in favour of quiet, unannounced encounters that explored, "the particularities of human social experience."²³¹ Together with a further, gradual withdrawal from the institutions of the cultural economy and an increasing interest in Zen Buddhism, Kaprow's interest in human social experience encouraged him to further extend the time of performance practice into the durations of everyday life.

***Trading Dirt* – Extending the Performance of Digging into The Everyday**

He began *Trading Dirt* when, "One day in 1983 Kaprow woke up with the idea 'to do an extended piece.'"²³² He dug a bucket full of earth from his garden. He placed the bucket and spade in his truck, then when the opportunity presented itself the earth would be exchanged for earth from another site. Earth from the new site would be kept in the bucket in the back of the truck until it was exchanged with earth from a further site. After three years and numerous exchanges the project ended when Kaprow moved away from the house and the garden that supplied the original bucket of earth.²³³ Kaprow relates the activities and narratives that emerged during *Trading Dirt* in a video tape recording that has been transposed in the third person by Jeff Kelly in *Childsplay, The Work of Allan Kaprow*.

Reading Kaprow's account of the project, I was struck by a number of resonances and contrasts with *Man Digs Pond*. Both projects involved the digging of earth using a spade, yet, as the title suggests, the labour of digging in *Trading Dirt* was of secondary importance to the act of trading. The digging in *Man Digs Pond* represented a large part of the performance's duration, whereas the negotiations between Kaprow and participants, the transportation of the earth and resulting dialogic transactions in *Trading Dirt* constituted the bulk of its duration. There are other interesting parallels between the two projects that Kaprow's re-telling has illuminated.

²³¹ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 125.

²³² The story of *Trading Dirt* is told by Kaprow in a video created on April 14th 1988 on the occasion of *Precedings*, at the Center for Research in Contemporary Art, University of Texas at Arlington, in Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 212-215. Kaprow's story is re-told by Kelley in the third person rather than the original first person.

²³³ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 212-215.

As the third anniversary of the London production of *Man Digs Pond* approached and plans for a further pond in the grounds of Birkbeck College were being negotiated, I was struck by the three-year duration of *Trading Dirt*. In the conception of both projects there was no plan for either a specific number of iterations or a fixed end time for the project. Rather the iterations of *Trading Dirt* and *Man Digs Pond* occur as and when opportunities arise. The relatively simple task of exchanging earth meant that for *Trading Dirt* these opportunities were more frequent than those for *Man Digs Pond*. Nevertheless, there were long periods between the iterations of *Trading Dirt*. As Kaprow acknowledges, the first bucket of earth, from Kaprow's own garden, remained in the back of his truck, "for several months"²³⁴ before he suddenly remembered it as he was preparing to leave the Zen Centre where he had been learning and meditating.

The first exchange of earth occurred suddenly and without any forward planning (other than Kaprow's thought, several months earlier, that it would be an interesting idea and his action of storing the bucket of earth in his truck). As he was about to exchange his garden's earth with earth from the garden of the Zen Center, one of the young men who lived at the centre suggested:

Instead of taking the dirt from around the plantings here, lets go under the house and take it from beneath the seat of our teacher. That way, it will be heavy-duty Buddhist dirt. It will have all the vibes of her ass.²³⁵

This re-telling by Kaprow uneasily situates the event in its time (1983). Perhaps Kaprow was amused by the implied commodification of the female anatomy, along with the dirt. Today, such an implication might form the basis of an entire critique or art project and would never be thrown away by an incidental remark. In his re-telling, the experiences of gender are highlighted in both life and art in 1980s America.

Kaprow then goes on to relate the process of crawling under the house, locating the area under his teacher's seat and with some difficulty in the confined space, scraping at the earth with a bucket. The earth was full of lumps of concrete and nails discarded during construction and was relatively poor in nutrients compared to the earth from his own garden. Yet the earth from under the Zen Center, according to Kaprow, "was spiritually 'vibrant' from prolonged exposure to 'Buddhist vibes.'"²³⁶ Here, the durations of Zen meditation had given the earth a significance and special value, though there is also

²³⁴ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 212.

²³⁵ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 212.

²³⁶ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 213.

playfulness in Kaprow's attention to the Buddhist qualities of the earth. As he emerged from under the house, other Zen Centre attendees commented on his actions:

When he told them he was trading dirt, they asked why. When he told them, 'That's what I do,' someone said, 'that's stupid.' Kaprow replied, 'I suppose you think sitting on a cushion day in and day out is smart.' Everyone laughed.²³⁷

For Kaprow this exchange encapsulated his assertion that meaning can emerge through dialogic transactions around the particularities of earth, meditation, stupidity or silliness. The exchange of earth had been, according to Kaprow, both profound and silly and he acknowledges that the drunken discussions on the meaning of life that followed the exchange would not have taken place if the exchange of earth had been only religious, ritualistic or philosophical.

The durations of labour are given form in this particular exchange, though perhaps in less obvious ways than in *Man Digs Pond*. The earth collected from under the house had been degraded by the detritus left over from the house's construction and reminds Kaprow of the labour involved in building the house. The earth from his garden, on the other hand had been improved over time through labour: " 'It was good dirt; we'd been working that dirt.' "²³⁸ The reader of this account is left to imagine what labour was involved in the improvement of the earth. The trade was fair because the earth from the garden had been improved through labour, while the earth from under the house had been improved by the 'work' of Buddhist meditation.

Kaprow gives two further examples of the exchange of earth in *Trading Dirt*. Several months after the initial exchange, and at the request of his friend, the 'heavy duty Buddhist earth' was exchanged for earth from the grave of his friends' dog, Hyden. Later, the "bucket full of Hyden"²³⁹ was exchanged for earth from the farm of a roadside vegetable seller. In all three locations, the earth is given significance by the durations and experiences that are associated with the specific location. The dog's grave announces thoughts of a beloved pet and through the duration of digging the earth brings the lifespan of Hyden into view. The dialogic transactions between Kaprow and the vegetable seller encourage the vegetable seller to consider her grandchild's future. As Kaprow carried the bucket of Hyden to the hole he had prepared, the vegetable seller threw some pumpkin seeds into the bucket and the following conversation occurred:

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 212.

²³⁹ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 214.

"I thought you were a professor," she challenged. "I am," he answered. "I even have classes in this sort of thing." The woman was incredulous. "They pay you for this? That's stupid." "I've heard that one before," Kaprow said, "but what's smart?" She gestured toward her three-year-old grandson, playing behind the counter, and said, "I suppose I should say 'Making a living and all,' but look at him. He's doing what he wants. It's a pity he can't do it for the rest of his life." "Sure he can," said Kaprow. "You can send him to UCSD."²⁴⁰

This dialogic transaction typifies the durations that *Trading Dirt* highlighted. The significance of the project lies not so much in the earth itself, the labour of digging or the location from which the earth was taken but rather in the processes of what was done with the earth that are enacted in its exchange. The values of the earth are negotiated through a playful experience of time that is manifested in the durations of human life (the grandson), animal life (Hyden), Zen meditation, plant life (pumpkin seeds), and digging (dirt that had been worked). The conversations encouraged by the trade; both playful and serious, make manifest the narratives that are encouraged by the project in the minds of participants and Kaprow alike and in Kaprow's re-telling offer a further layer of narrative via Kelley's transcription.

For Kaprow the trading of dirt over an extended time frame is also a playful parody of the art market that he critiqued throughout his career.

When you think of it (and when you do, it's funny), the process of negotiating the relative value of this versus that bucket of dirt – with its arbitrary estimations, its rationalizations of sentiment and taste, its elaborate framing rituals, its citation of authoritative sources, its invention of a narrative, its passing of gossip, and, ultimately, its faith in the trader – is rather like the processes by which works of art are appraised by critics, curators, collectors, the public, and artists too.²⁴¹

The economics of art production and dwelling are negotiated in the two quotes above. The conversation with the vegetable seller reveals the need we all have to earn a living and the fact that Kaprow was able to feed, clothe and house himself with the support of the university. For *Man Digs Pond* in London, I was supported by Arts Council England. For the show in Reims, to be examined in the next section, the theatre that commissioned the show supported the performance technically, administratively and financially. In the following chapters I reveal how the university supported my practice through a

²⁴⁰ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 214. Note: UCSD is University of California at San Diego.

²⁴¹ Kelley, *Childsplay*, p. 215.

maintenance grant and by providing the infrastructures of learning: discussion groups, seminars, libraries, a studio and gallery space for experiments, etc. My point is that Kaprow was able to experiment with the digging and exchange of earth and the economics of art production because he was supported by institutions of learning.

Part B - Reflection on Personal Practice

Digging as Happening and Performing Through the Everyday Economies of a Theatre

Where Do We Go From Here? at The Little Ecological Arts Festival

Albion Millennium Green, London 1st – 4th May 2013²⁴²

The enthusiasm with which participants handled the spades in the tree-planting event (chapter one) and the transactions this activity fostered between tools, earth and humans, combined with the desire expressed by many spectators in *Man Digs Pond* to help with the work of digging encouraged me to conduct a participatory digging experiment in the creative context of Kaprow's performance of tasks extended through time and Artaud's concept of heterogeneous performance that is experienced through space by artist and audience alike. I ask if participation in the action of digging reinforces the authorial voice of the artist or whether the participants are able to translate the experience into their own experience and narratives of dwelling in the city.

Like the tree planting events and *Man Digs Pond* in 2011, *Where Do We Go From Here?* occurred in Albion Millennium Green (AMG). Lasting six hours per day for four days, visitors were invited to help restore pathways on AMG by removing soil and grass (turf) that had grown over them. An actor, Jody Machin was on hand to help and a sign explained

²⁴² Video documentation of *Where Do We Go From Here?* (6') see: <https://vimeo.com/66529235> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video B) For poster of *LEAF*, see Appendix 4, for Programme of *LEAF* see Appendix 5. For video documentation of *LEAF* (3') see: <https://vimeo.com/69891948> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video C)

the process; turf is cut into squares then using a spade the cut squares are dug up and put aside for laying on a different part of AMG. Under the turf pathways had remained in good condition and once exposed were fit for use.

Stone and gravel paths were constructed when AMG was developed as a public park in 2000. The paths wind through the space and invite visitors to explore. Since their construction there had been little attention paid to their maintenance. Turf slowly spread across the paths, largely obscuring the original pathway and they became muddy in wet weather. In the autumn of 2012 I began digging up the turf and revealing the gravel path underneath which had remained in good condition. The results of this action were clear to see as the path was gradually revealed. Visitors to AMG responded positively to the restoration of the path appreciating the cleared path's aesthetic value as it welcomes visitors into the space.

Building a wall, fence or barrier creates a boundary and asserts ownership or sovereignty. Building a pathway or road also asserts control over a place but a wall keeps people inside or outside the area it divides and prevents human movement whereas a pathway through a public space invites movement through it. The dry even surface of the restored path encourages visitors to explore and connects the different areas of AMG. In making these connections, people who walk on the path are also experiencing the interconnections between different trees, plants and animal life that make up the ecology of AMG.

Where Do We Go From Here? was performed as one of around twenty activities in a wider event called the *Little Ecological Arts Festival* (LEAF). LEAF was conceived as a response to some of the questions that were arising from my initial research: what kinds of performance constructions can encourage people to experience the ecologies of the city? What happens when the digging is done, not by A Man, but by lots of people? What happens when, like *18 Happenings*, and *Untitled Event*, there are many different events happening simultaneously? Interactive installation, theatre, spoken word and sculpture all rubbed up against *Where Do We Go From Here?* during LEAF and produced many chance interactions and fleeting narratives.

Where Do We Go From Here? could only happen under these very particular ecological conditions where soil had built up over gravel pathways. It was a response to the specific conditions of AMG where wildlife and humans exist side by side under the pressure of an expanding human population and the urban sprawl. The question: *Where Do We Go*

From Here? can be asked from several perspectives. On a macro level it asks participants to consider future ways of dwelling in the city. What are the best ways forward if we want to flourish? On a personal level, the question relates to the direction of my research that was still in its first year. My practical experiments and analysis of TLT and Kaprow had raised interesting questions about degrees of participation, site sensitivity, the social labour of digging, the performance matrix and the everyday. Here was an opportunity to see how people react to the call to pick up a spade in the context of a constructed event. Would they be as keen to dig as *Man Digs Pond* had suggested they might be? Might people be interested in watching others dig? The installation itself gives material form to the title's question because the direction of the overgrown pathway ahead is not clear and diggers have to slowly excavate the path's edges and feel their way along its route. In my mind, the installation attempts to *answer* the question not just practically by revealing the pathway forward but metaphorically by encouraging participants to enact a collective and social labour of digging as part of a creative endeavour to connect humans to the ecologies of a public space in the city. Digging in this context is not backbreaking labour but suggests that we might find the answer to the title's question through collective ecological action that also foregrounds a need to keep asking the question.

I conceived of *LEAF* and curated it in the sense that I invited all the participating artists to dwell together in the same place and respond to the particular ecologies and heterogeneous durations of AMG; ecologies that are themselves brushing up against the hard-surface urban ecologies and the clock-time that dominates the durations of life in the city. I funded the event myself (with acknowledgment of the maintenance grant I received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council) which freed me from the labour of fundraising and any restriction on activities that might arise from a funding stream. Artists took part for expenses only rather than a professional fee though I offered the duration of *LEAF* as an opportunity for *them* to work, explore or rehearse in a new context, so they were also part of the same process of experimentation. I was learning *with* other artists, research students and visitors to the festival.

I 'performed' as a participant in many of the events and spent many hours during the festival generating video and photographic documentation. The level of visitor participation varied considerably from event to event: from helping in the construction of a giant nest, to following an open rehearsal of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as it moved around AMG, to sitting on the grass and listening to poetry. *LEAF* involved around 35 artists

and performers including professional artists and actors, five research students from Birkbeck's School of Arts, and four former students I taught at London Contemporary Dance School, Leicester College and London Metropolitan University. A total of around 460 people visited *LEAF* that ran daily from 2pm until 8pm over four days. Visitors included three classes and teachers from Holy Trinity Primary School (some of whom returned after school alone or with their parents to continue their participation). Photographic and video evidence enabled reflection on the processes, interactions and a few of the ephemeral chance encounters that occurred.

Younger participants negotiated their physical limitations by handling the heavy tools used in *Where Do We Go From Here?*. Levering the spade and cutting turf required re-alignment of body weight to use the tools effectively and groups were often left unsupervised to negotiate who would perform which part of the task and with which tool. Tension and drama is revealed in the negotiations between participants and their struggle with the task. Who gives the advice or encouragement and who does the manual work? There is further narrative tension in the unknown destination of the pathway and satisfaction in revealing the buried gravel and progressing forward slowly but with the results of the work clearly visible to all.

As evidenced in the video documentation, the installation rubbed up against other events in the Green, including *Nest* by Nathalie Hauwelle that lay in the direction of the path's emergence. A sense of slow movement towards the nest emerged as a motivating factor and turf removed from the pathway was placed on the floor of the emerging nest as a carpet of green. Open rehearsals and work in progress showings of *After The Tempest* (based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) by Teatro Vivo moved around *Where Do We Go From Here?*. These proximities layered new narratives over the installation, the nest and the reading of *The Tempest*.

For example, towards the end of the video documentation (4'45" – 5'24") a child and his father are performing *Where Do We Go From Here?*. They are working together to cut and dig turf unsupervised with no apparent audience except myself and the camera watching from a situated distance. The child is struggling with the task of digging and his father is focussed on helping his son. From the left, a train rushes past about twenty meters away and the child turns towards the sound of the engine and metal wheels pressing against the steel track. After the initial reaction the child returns back to the task of digging and the sound of the train subsides.

Fifteen meters to the right a scene from *The Tempest* is being enacted with an

attendant audience. Prospero, shipwrecked on an island (the island in this case being AMG) and the central protagonist is questioning Ariel, his spirit/servant and native of the island. Prospero accuses Ariel of not carrying out his orders correctly and asks if the tasks required of the spirit such as “To do me business in the veins of the earth”²⁴³ are below Ariel’s dignity. At that moment, in *my* mind, the child digging through the veins of the earth represented the servant Ariel and the child’s father who was guiding his son became his master, Prospero. When the ‘real’ Prospero shouted in response to Ariel’s defence, “Thou liest, malignant thing!”²⁴⁴ the two performances intertwined as the child reacted to the raised voice of Prospero by sharply turning his head towards the source of the voice. The child was startled as if the words had been spoken to him. After only a second or two, the child turned back to his work and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, “I’m not sure what that shouting was about but they were clearly only playing.” The vision of the child-as-Ariel persisted as he picked up the turf cutter and tried to push it into the turf. For a moment, a child of about three years old performed the task of digging as enforced labour under colonial rule though in the heterogeneous contexts of a playful arts installation, a public green space and a rehearsed reading of Shakespeare, this ephemeral representation of Ariel could never be re-presented. It would have been virtually impossible to plan such a fleeting elision that was probably only noticed by me. Yet this moment was one of many elisions I noticed and there must have been many more ephemeral tensions, contrasts and chance collisions missed by me but visible to other visitors at the festival.

At one point I noticed the actor, Mark Stevenson who was playing Caliban in *After The Tempest* with a turf cutter in one hand and a spade in the other. He stood alone at the edge of the restored path staring down. He seemed to be particularly nonchalant and not trying very hard to perform the task. I was about to go and give him some technical tips and then I realised that he was not really concerned with the task but more concerned with performing his idea of Caliban’s response to the installation. Caliban is Prospero’s other servant on the island and only carries out the tasks set for him under the threat of the physical torture he has been subjected to in the past as punishment for the attempted rape of Miranda, Prospero’s daughter. For a few minutes *Where Do We Go From Here?* became a scene of enforced labour, this time with a ‘real’ actor playing a tormented, reluctant and rebellious slave.

Another reluctant digger appeared regularly on the scene to watch the action. John

²⁴³ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2, line 257.

²⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2, line 259.

John would stand around watching people dig and tentatively offer advice. I often thought of John John as Caliban. Particularly when he talked about his time in prison in Argentina, where he had to work on chain gangs fixing roads in the heat of summer. Any skin exposed to the sun would burn and blister but John John refused to wear a hat or shirt and after months of pain his body gradually adjusted to the heat. He put himself through this torture he told me, so that when opportunity arose for escape, even if he didn't have time to grab a hat he would still be able to withstand the demands of walking for days in the heat. I was disappointed that John John didn't pick up a spade during *Where Do We Go From Here?* but for him digging a pathway (or road) meant enforced hard labour, constant thirst, burning skin and dwelling in a prison cell as punishment for drug trafficking. I could easily forgive his reluctance to get stuck in.

Next to the labouring children, bent over their tools, John John looked to me like a gentle giant from a fairy tale and he looked friendly and genial but I could not shake off the knowledge of his violent past. During an ephemeral moment the child who represented Ariel held a spade or turf cutter and looked at John John who looked at the tool that blocked his way. In my constructed narrative there was a transaction between the earthy tormented slave Caliban and Ariel, the spirit of the air who is forced to dig through the veins of the earth. For the child and for John John there are dialogic transactions between two people negotiating their place of dwelling through the frame of a constructed event and the performance of digging.

The importance to this thesis of *Where Do We Go From Here?* lies not only in the performance of digging during *LEAF* and the participants' responses and chance interactions with other events. Other affects came to light after the event. For example, two regular users of AMG did not participate in *Where Do We Go From Here?* during *LEAF* but their actions in the months afterwards evidences the way they received the activity. After *LEAF* path restoration was continued by an anonymous volunteer who preferred to work in secret with a barrow and spade hidden under a Horse Chestnut Tree in AMG. When I finally met Richard, he turned out to be the opposite of John John: very short, thin, with long hair, unshaven and unwilling to engage in verbal dialogue but equally troubled. I'm not sure why Richard continues to persevere in his task. He receives little thanks. Sometimes he gets carried away and removes flora that was deliberately planted. His tasks involve the same processes as *Where Do We Go From Here?*. The only difference between Richard's role and the role of participants during the show arises from the deliberate constructs that made *Where Do We Go From Here?* an event, yet its ability to engage with the ways we

dwelling in the city is evidenced by Richard's continuation of the activity after artists and audience have gone home. His life in the city, however difficult, was made more bearable when he was left alone to dig up turf, restore the pathways of a public space, affirm his power as a member of a community and have some control over the chaotic city he dwells in.

After *LEAF* Richard's friend Cameron, who lives next to AMG in the same block as John John, began mowing the grassland in the Green. Cameron, a former Seaman with The Royal Navy is an alcoholic. I met him many times in AMG where he drinks Guinness and smokes cannabis. After *LEAF* he still drinks and smokes in AMG but not before he has taken the mower around and kept the grassland accessible. Cameron was initially nervous about asking if he could use the mower. It was a task I had taken responsibility for since I raised money for the mower in 2008 and Cameron did not want to step on my toes. I was more than happy to pass on my responsibilities and asked Cameron why he was so keen to mow the lawn. He replied:

It was seeing all those kids running around the Green during the arts festival. I just thought; this is a great place and I want to give something back.

The idea of 'giving something back' is a phrase that suggests a way of dwelling that counters the financial exchanges that dominate our economic lives. There is also a sense of loss: of giving something away for free (time and energy) that might otherwise benefit the giver monetarily. The phrase suggests sacrifice that connects with a primal human activity that, I argue, must return if we are to heal our ecologies. Oil, coal and gas companies will have to sacrifice the profits they could make by leaving their known reserves in the ground if we are to avoid ecological collapse. Cameron passed me a can of Guinness and we strolled around the pathways, newly cleared by his friend, Richard. After a year, weeds and grass began encroaching on the pathway once again. In the spring of 2014, as I passed through AMG, I bumped into Cameron who was clearing these new weeds with a spade and rake (Figure 2.1). Richard and Cameron continued the work started during *LEAF*. They laboured alone without pay but with a sense of collective responsibility for the ecologies through which they dwelled.



Figure 2.1. (left) Cameron repairs pathways on AMG. Spring 2014. Photo: Author, reproduced with the subject's permission.

***Man Digs Pond* at La Comédie de Reims, Champagne-Ardenne, France**

Festival Reims Scènes d'Europe, 5pm 30th Nov – 5pm Dec 1st 2013²⁴⁵

Each location for *Man Digs Pond* affords the event different conditions of production that determine its selection, form and reception. In London *and* Reims, the performance's only explicit narrative concerns the desire of a person to construct a wildlife pond in the twenty-four hours of the performance. This basic narrative structure suggests meanings associated with human production, achievement, labour, the limitations of the human body engaged in a physically demanding task and the human position in the ecologies through which the event occurs. As I staked out the shape of the pond in the garden of the theatre, there was no doubt that I was 'staking a claim' on this plot of ground in the city. I was asserting my authority over the land and the landscape by saying to the theatre: 'this bit of your world is now going to operate according to the rules of my experiment.' The title is intended as an

²⁴⁵ See Appendices 5 and 6 for scan of the programme. For video documentation (3') see: <https://vimeo.com/88080335> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video E) For video documentation (20') see: <https://vimeo.com/88143569> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video F)

ironic reflection on banner headlines that celebrate human achievement like perhaps: 'Britain Wins Gold', 'World's Tallest Building', 'Man On The Moon', etc. The action of digging a pond will never make the front page since a muddy pond celebrates only the frogs, birds, plants and insects that might dwell in its murky waters.

The reception of meanings is dependant on many variables such as the amount of time the spectator spends at the event, their positioning in the space, the extent and form of their participation, their own personal experiences of labour, work and wildlife ponds and their relationship to the landscape through which the event occurs. The show aims at a site sensitivity that responds to the specific community and place that it moves through. Following Kaprow's concern with the everyday durations and labours of life, in Reims the theatre of social labour happens in the context of the everyday workplace of a theatre.

In London, participants, contributors and audience were drawn from the wider social constituency of those living near AMG who might not ever visit a theatre. The London audience might therefore expect to see an everyday act of labour to develop a public space and the construction of a pond but be surprised by the scenography and temporal frames of a performance event. Conversely at La Comédie de Reims, an important regional theatre situated about eighty miles to the North East of Paris, participants, contributors and spectators were drawn from the cultural infrastructure and regular audience associated with the theatre. They might therefore expect a formally constructed performance event but be surprised by the extended labour of digging and the installation of a durable feature in the landscape.

In the context of the institution of a theatre, it may seem appropriate to draw parallels between the performance in Reims and the theatre orientated performance practice of TLT. La Comédie de Reims handled all the necessary permissions and offered technical, creative, financial and administrative support that helped me understand the reasons why TLT returned to the theatre after their experience of *Turning The Earth* in the streets of Pittsburgh. Likewise, there were constructed elements of the performance such as lighting and my rejection of the spoken word that distanced the performance from the everyday scenography and verbal exchanges of *Trading Dirt*. Yet in terms of the relationship to the place of performance and the community through which it moved, I argue the performance owes more to Kaprow's interest in the everyday rather than TLT's interest in psychic transformation.

During the ten days leading up to the performance, I stayed in a house next to the proposed site of the pond that was used by the theatre for temporary artist's lodgings (see

Figure 2.2). The position of this everyday dwelling on the site suggested a sense of domesticity. The Workshop Theatre loomed over the site but it was separated from the garden by a tarmac road and parking bays, whereas the house shared the same ground as the site for the pond that might be imagined as existing in the garden of the house.



Figure 2.2. (Above) Reims *Man Digs Pond* site 'disposition': a photographic collage of the garden, showing the artist's lodging house that overlooked the scene. This image was used by the theatre's technical staff to determine the position of the pond. Photography: Simon Scrive.

From my bedroom in the house I could look out over the site and try and imagine how the pond would sit within the landscape (It is the same view as the camera's view in video documentation of the event). The house became an important part of the event, where helpers could get some respite from the cold weather and prepare refreshments for me. During the show backlit coloured gels in the windows of the house connected it to the event and suggested a constructed narrative of domesticity: it became the home of the man who dug through his garden.

Since 2011, I had built up a relationship with La Comédie de Reims: rehearsing two theatre performances there and performing in roughly twenty performances in the workshop theatre that faced the garden where the pond would emerge. During these experiences and during preparation for the show I had an opportunity to talk (sometimes with the help of an interpreter) to the theatre's staff. All the theatre's departments wanted an explanation of the project and many offered advice. These conversations helped me understand the ways that staff related to the event and how it spoke to their own way of dwelling in their workplace. The head technician, Simon Scrive was particularly concerned by the difficulty of the task and repeatedly told me about a mechanical digger he could arrange that would save me a lot of time. The theatre's head chef wanted to know what I would eat to build up my strength in the period leading up to the dig and offered to bring me hot vegetable soup during the show. The marketing department wanted to know how

they could explain the project to press and the local TV news. The costume department wanted to know what I would wear. The head cleaner of the theatre, Corinne Gomes da Silva, told me about her pond in the countryside outside Reims and she offered to help me collect plants and mud for the new pond (I will be returning to Gomes da Silva's contribution to the performance). An usher at the theatre offered to run a stall serving warm mulled wine for audience and performer throughout the night. Three administrative staff offered to stay up through the night with the performance. The theatre offered support from all production departments and employed theatre director, Mikaël Serre to spend a week with me in the period leading up to the show planning the event and exploring dramaturgical possibilities. Serre accompanied me throughout the performance and though he did not do any digging, he was on hand to deal with any problems that might arise and was interviewed by the local TV news crew that arrived during the show.²⁴⁶



Figure 2.3. (Left) Reims
Man Digs Pond.
Photograph: The Author

Gomes da Silva took me to her pond in the countryside outside the city where we uprooted aquatic plants and took them to the theatre. With the help of Serre, a narrative involving

²⁴⁶ Video of *Man Digs Pond* TV Article, Reims 2013 (1') with Serre's interview available online here: <https://vimeo.com/88294433> (Memory stick, Appendix 9, video D).

Gomes da Silva was woven into the performance. Posters were made with the image of us both in front of her pond, suggesting an intimate relationship. During the show a framed photo hung next to my spades and tools (Figure 2.3). The suggestion was that the digger might be digging to help him understand the breakdown of a relationship or the death of a partner and digging as a healing process. The casual observer, as happened in London, might imagine I am digging a grave for the same person. Gomes da Silva is well known and liked among all the theatre's staff. As a cleaner, her labour is usually hidden from the theatre's audience and from the creative process. The focus of *Man Digs Pond* was on the everyday labour of digging but for some seers, the everyday labour of cleaning a theatre was also revealed.

At 5pm on 30th November 2013, I waited in the hallway of the house used by the theatre as artists' lodgings. It was about fifteen meters away from the area I had marked out for the pond. Though I was waiting in a domestic hallway in a house with a kitchen, living rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms, this felt very much like waiting in the wings about to go on stage. Like London there was no text to remember but this time I could hear the expectant murmur of the audience and like I had done countless times before I nervously checked my costume. Staff of the theatre scurried around asking if I was ready. They saw the costume for the first time and I caught their expression. They were surprised. Perhaps they had expected the costume of a labourer, peasant or construction worker: overalls or dungarees or jeans. I had made a few adjustments to my costume since London but the impression remained; brown cotton two-piece suit, brown 'wellington boots', a fur hat of mixed browns and a striped shirt in varying shades of brown. Underneath, I wore super warm thermals. It was definitely not the clothing of a 'worker' or 'labourer'.

Producing *Man Digs Pond* in London had involved a considerable amount of planning, fund-raising and collaboration with many different organisations, groups and individuals. The administration of the event took up nearly all my time in the months leading up to the public showing. When I began digging in London I realised that I had not had a chance to think about how my largely instinctive scenographic decisions (informed by years of performing) might be received. Costume was hastily chosen from my personal wardrobe more for its brown 'earthy' colour than with any consideration of what was signalled by the style of costume. I liked the fact that my clothing came from my wardrobe because, for me at least, there was never any attempt to portray a 'character' other than my own. It had not occurred to me that The Man is anyone but me, Bruno Roubicek. I am in

unusual, matrixed, circumstances; performing the act of digging, but the idea of wearing the costume of a labourer, miner, peasant farmer or character from the Old Testament and transforming myself into a constructed persona far removed from my own never occurred to me. How was my costume received by the audience? What narratives were suggested by my brown suit and fur hat?

My costume suggested to one reviewer not a labourer but a “gentleman farmer”,²⁴⁷ suggesting a member of the land-owning class who would usually employ others to undertake manual labour. Perhaps my costume signalled that The Man was not concerned with the labour of digging to earn a wage. In London, the motivations of The Man were identified through verbal transactions between audience and the performer (who was already known to many of the spectators). These transactions perhaps revealed no more of a narrative than Bruno Roubicek, a fairly amiable bloke digging a hole for a pond. In Reims and the context of the theatre there were opportunities to suggest further narrative layers that have the possibility of extending the duration of the performance through the past and into the future. Without the spoken word at my disposal, these narratives were suggested by scenography, costume or programme notes. For example, the solo action of digging offered a counterpoint to the images of a happy union with Gomes da Silva that were dotted around the theatre, perhaps suggesting digging as a process of healing in reaction to loss.

The participation of Gomes da Silva, Serre, technicians, caterers, ushers and administrative staff evidences the ways the performance in Reims developed durational collaborations and experiences within the regulatory, economic and social structures of a theatre. Like the participants in London, who were drawn more widely from the local community, the nature of these collaborations shape the way the event is received, yet they convey a different set of signs depending on the socio-economic and cultural conditions in which the event is produced and the histories associated with both site and spectator.

I walked towards the four-meter diameter circle that I had carefully marked out in the garden of the workshop theatre of La Comédie de Reims.²⁴⁸ Twenty or thirty people were watching me. I paused in front of the circle, unsure how to react to an unexpected ripple of

²⁴⁷ See Appendix 8. Françoise Lapeyre, “Vingt-quatre heures en non-stop pour créer un bassin”, *L’Union*, Tuesday 3rd December, 2013. *L’Union* is a French regional newspaper. Headquarters: Reims (Marne). Also available in the departments of Aisne and Ardennes.

²⁴⁸ Full Programme of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims available in Appendices 6 and 7.

applause. In 25 years of professional performing I had never received applause at the start of a performance. Buoyed by the support of the spectators I felt relieved to be starting and tried to ignore the adrenalin that coursed through my veins, a symptom of that familiar fear; the fear of failure, the fear of the unknown, the fear of physical pain and the fear of letting down the theatre that had invested time and money in the venture.

This time I was determined not to speak for twenty-four hours: to foreground the durational experience of digging, and allow narratives, experiences and feelings to emerge rather than solidifying narrative through spoken language. Bergson has illuminated the ways in which language can divert attention from the 'real duration' of the experience of process. As he wrote in 1911, "We instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language. Hence we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially with the word which expresses this object." During *Man Digs Pond* in London, I was often asked what I was doing and why. The reply: "digging a pond for wildlife" fixed the idea of digging and of a pond in the mind of the spectator. If however the spectator observes actions and gestures through time, then meaning is suggested or gleaned through the experience of processes that are constantly emerging and changing. In Reims, refusing to engage in conversation encouraged the audience to experience the event as an emerging process that might encourage them to see digging not as a fixed action that is repeated but as a process that evolves according to the ecology through which it occurs (the materials being dug into for example or the changing weather and the exhaustion of the performer).

My lack of speech does not mean that there was no communication or acknowledgement between performer, participants and spectators who were warned by the programme notes, festival brochure and the theatre staff who moved among the spectators, that I would not speak. On the contrary, there was a steady flow of correspondence between performer and spectators but because the communication was non-verbal and consisted of gestures and glances I was never distracted from my task for more than a brief moment, I was able to focus on the experience and processes of digging and the audience were left to 'translate' the performance into their own experience. Evidence suggests that this focus encouraged the audience (like the spectators of the tree planting event with Holy Trinity School in 2011) to also focus on the task and evolving processes of digging.

For example, a ripple of anticipation resonated as I loaded the first wheelbarrow full of earth. When it was full I grasped the handles, bent my knees and signalling a moment

of significance made a rare glance towards the visitors. Straightening my knees, the wheelbarrow's legs were lifted off the ground and as I leaned forward the barrow moved with me. There was a low-pitched moan from a few people in the audience that gradually rose in pitch and volume as I approached the area I had prepared to receive the earth. As I tipped the earth out of the barrow the continuing moan reached a crescendo with a high-pitched cheer then rapidly diminished to a few giggles or comments.

Wwwwooooaahhheeyyyyyy ...

The action of moving the barrow and emptying it took about ten seconds, occurred around 45 times and was experienced by the audience as an improvised vocal, group exclamation. Variations to the vocal accompaniment might occur if I stumbled, the wheel of the barrow jammed against a stone or my grip on the barrow loosened and it tipped sideways or there was some other rupture to the smooth operation of the action. This rhythmic vocal accompaniment energised me. It suggested that the audience were alive to the activity and aligning themselves to its processes, rhythms and ruptures. Interventions varied according to who was watching and according to variations in the activity; the distance travelled by the barrow, the size of the load and the smoothness and speed of action. Spectators were enduring the process, not only by observing and certainly not by digging themselves but by correspondence through rhythmic vocal expression.

The ground was a mixture of soil, stones, chalk and some old building materials such as broken wall tiles. Progress was relatively swift in Reims and I was able to establish a steady rhythm of digging. As earth was dug up in the garden of the theatre, the history of the site was revealed. I extracted landfill: rubble left over from the theatre's construction and sparks flew as my mattock hit a large rock. The sparks and accompanying sharp ringing tone generated a gasp from the assembled audience who were not 'just looking' but finding narratives and responding to tensions. I stopped digging and spent half an hour probing around the rock and excavating around its edges. The process of rock extraction required different tools, such as a long metal bar, different actions and more careful work in order to establish the edges of the stone and the techniques needed for its removal. During these moments I would have to sit, partly obscured in the hole. Spectators were drawn closer in an effort to observe the drama between human and stone that was being played out. People guessed at the size of the stone as it was slowly revealed. When it was excavated after considerable struggle there was a cheer from the spectators and comments on the

size and weight of the stone. Like the tree planting event described in chapter one, some of the most intense reaction from the spectators in Reims occurred when the duration of the non-human (in this case a large stone) asserted itself in the narrative by disrupting the intended rhythm of the human performer.²⁴⁹

In a theatre auditorium spectators can respond to what they receive in a multitude of different ways. Laughter, gasping, clapping, cheering or stilled silence for example, are all ways in which spectators can express themselves.²⁵⁰ Generally, in the theatre the audience are asked to refrain from speaking while the actors on stage do the talking. The spectators for *Man Digs Pond* in London were in the end given free range to enter into verbal transactions with the performer and between themselves. In Reims, like in the tree planting on AMG, the spectators did *all* the talking.

The conversations and reactions among the spectators that I overheard during the event were many and varied and as a record, represent anecdotal evidence (on reflection an audio recording might have been as illuminating as the video recording proved to be). My lack of speech and British nationality was of particular interest. Some thought I was not speaking because of my poor French language skills. Others wanted to know my name, where I was from and why I had been invited to perform at the festival. Some spectators talked about the duration of the performance and wondered if I would stop for food, sleep or the toilet. People commented on the difficulty of working for twenty-four hours without sleep and wondered whether I was on track to finish the job in the specified time. Others discussed my costume. Many conversations were about the pond and its emergence. People discussed the projected size and depth of the finished pond. Others asked about what plants I would be adding to the completed pond. Some people talked about their own experiences of ponds; how they swam in one when they were young, or how they built their own pond and they compared their own efforts to the pond emerging before them.

Apart from the dialogic transactions among spectators and theatre staff in Reims, some approached and spoke to me. Knowing that I was unable to answer, these approaches were usually statements such as 'good luck' or 'thank you'. Wanting to acknowledge these interventions, I would stop digging, make eye contact and smile or place my right hand, palm down over my chest above my heart (a gesture of goodwill

²⁴⁹ It seemed like a good idea to construct an installation with excavated stones and I carefully balanced them, one on top of the other. The stones would eventually be placed as a feature in the pond but in the meantime, they represented the beginning, perhaps, of a new dwelling.

²⁵⁰ In some forms of theatre, such as the Christmas Pantomime tradition in Britain the audience are expected to respond verbally and in unison to well known cues. In stand-up comedy improvised verbal intervention from the audience, known as 'heckling' is generally frowned upon by comedians but can also be encouraged and generate admiration if handled skillfully.

common in the Middle East). Some launched into longer speeches and a few tried to provoke me into speaking. As one reviewer noted,

The public are invited to convivially support the labour of the actor by singing. Two young girls approach the pond, and sing Piaf and ... Eminem, then they try dancing to distract Bruno Roubicek, who cannot repress a smile ...²⁵¹

Gesture replaced language as the performer's primary method of interaction with the audience. The actions or gestures of digging and moving earth replaced the countless verbal transactions that occurred in the London show and during the planning of both iterations. They operated differently because I argue, physical gesture and action is experienced as a fluid process of becoming in which meaning is suggested by the performer and interpreted by the spectator, each spectator receiving the gesture according to their own perspective or what Bergson refers to as "*partial* views of the whole."²⁵² Language can 'solidify' (Bergson) experience into complete homogenous meaning but suggestive gesture received as a partial view of the whole can offer the opportunity for the spectator to consider their own position in relation to the event, the site and the performer and translate the performance into their own experience of life.

'Ugly time' seemed to last forever in Reims. I was in agony. My back was burning. Every bend or stretch was hurting. Whiskey helped. This time I had considered the important scenographic component of the pond's size, depth and shape. The theatre required a detailed scale drawing of the proposed pond in order to gain permission for its construction from the Mayor's office in Reims. The pond was round with stepped horizontal ledges at varying depths down to one meter, offering a variety of potential habitats for flora and fauna. Following a design, rather than allowing the design to emerge during the event, allowed a more thoughtful, methodical approach to the action of digging in Reims.

I developed various rhythms that became part of the durations of turf cutting, soil loosening and scooping up. The steady rhythms of digging highlighted moments of disruption to the rhythm (described above) when the audience expressed their experience of the process with audible exclamations or comments. Despite a more methodical approach I was unable to avoid the back pain I had experienced in London. The toes on my left foot were strangely numb, though not from cold, since the labour of digging had kept

²⁵¹ Francoise Lapeyre, "Vingt-quatre heures en non-stop pour créer un bassin" See Appendix 8.

²⁵² Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell, (London; MacMillan, 1911) p.32.

me warm and sweat was evaporating as steam from my back, shoulders, chest and groin. With the sun still two hours away, 'ugly time' was at its ugliest. Exhausted, but with two more hours of digging left, I sat on a low stool, lit a cigarette and stared blankly at the hole in the ground. Most of the spectators had gone. A woman asked if there was any champagne on offer. Her dog sniffed at some cold vegetable soup that sat in a bowl near my feet. I could not raise a smile for the dog. I did not even glance up to the woman asking for champagne. I sat with that expression that I so often attempted on stage but rarely achieved: 'deadpan', that unmoving, blank stare. But deadpan is not expressionless. Behind the mask, through the pools of eyes that stare out, is bemusement at the world, a sense of wonder and a dark, deep hole containing pain and loss.

The Reims production of *Man Digs Pond* was presented in the context of an international theatre festival with the "Earth" as its theme,²⁵³ where it might be received as both landscape emergence and performance practice by spectators who are familiar with the location and the local theatre culture. The participants and collaborators consisted largely of theatre professionals ranging from the stage and lighting crew to administrative staff and as I explained, the head cleaner of the theatre. If the pond survives for a number of years as intended, then its geographical location in the grounds of a theatre and the slowly emerging ecosystem it is designed to encourage might also encourage in the imaginations of those who see the pond a thought of the durational performance of digging long after the human performer has gone home.

For Gomes da Silva, the pond continues to play a role in her life. As the head cleaner of the theatre, her professional involvement had previously been hidden from the creative process and limited to clearing up the mess left by the theatre companies and individuals that had occupied its stages, dressing rooms, artists lodgings and offices. Her participation in this production represented a new experience. In the months after the show, she posted photos of improvements she had been making to the pond on social media. She told me about the death of her husband two years before. After her involvement in the show she had stopped taking the tranquilizers she had been prescribed since her loss. Her contribution to the pond and to the constructed narrative of loss had helped heal some emotional scars and transformed her relationship with her place of work.

²⁵³ An editorial in the festival program by Bruno Latour outlines the thinking behind the theme of the festival: "It is the Earth that is now quaking... The era we live in is one of unprecedented changes within the terrestrial biosphere. Climate change, erosion of biodiversity, pollution of the lands and seas, damage of resources, etc. We must really grasp awareness of all this and think twice about the way we live on Earth." Accessed online, <http://www.scenesdeurope.eu/home/> 25th February 2014.



Figure 2.4. In the years after the pond's construction it has been a focal point for the theatre's annual spring party. Photograph: Comédie de Reims

The incremental developments in the life of the pond in both London and Reims reflect a continuing interaction between the place, some participants, some spectators and some of those who selected and helped produce the work. The production and reception of performance is contingent upon the regulatory frameworks, power relations, and histories of the place in which it occurs. In my experiments, the landscape, spectators and performance bring histories, expectations and projections that combine through multiple temporalities to correspond with the taskscape. In the summer of 2014, the head technician installed a solar powered water pump to help oxygenate the pond. During the two summers after the pond's construction it became the focal point of the theatre's annual end of season party. An administrator at the theatre, Mariane Thomas, posted a comment with a photograph of the event (Figure 2.4): "Wonderful party last Saturday in the garden of the [workshop theatre]... we danced all night around the pond, enjoying its good vibes!!" I was reminded of the 'heavy duty Buddhist vibes' that Kaprow discovered in the builder's rubble underneath his teacher's seat during *Trading Dirt*.



Figure 2.5. (Above) Still from video of *Man Digs Pond*, Reims showing audience dancing around the pond at the end of the performance. Video: Bruno Roubicek and Mikaël Serre.

All the artists above, including me and in the next chapter Agnes Denes, in their performances of digging use their authority to colonise a place of dwelling. These exertions of power can offend and challenge the communities through which they occur but these confrontations can generate dialogic transactions that negotiate the rules that dominate our economic lives and the transactions between earth, air and water that dominate our ecologies.

Conclusion

This conclusion will focus on the durational aspects of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims, *Where Do We Go From Here?* and Kaprow's *Trading Dirt* and on how our modes of dwelling are experienced through the act of digging during performance that extends through time and through the everyday city. I will return to Artaud as a theoretical frame through which to draw conclusions about the experiences generated in the performance practices described above.

Duration

Theatre can manipulate the experience of time in playful and interesting ways by constructing what Michael Kirby describes as a time "matrix"²⁵⁴ where time is carefully controlled and structured to achieve a particular experience. For example, what Schechner describes as "symbolic time"²⁵⁵ involves the representation of time passing at a faster or slower speed than actual clock-time when several hours, days or years can pass during a change of scenery or an interval. The performance work I describe in this thesis however favours the experience of the actual time it takes for a task to be completed or the earth to revolve, a crop to ripen, the hands of a clock to rotate or the weather to change and I argue encourages spectators to reflect on their own experiences of the 'everyday' durations of work, leisure, rest and ultimately a life.

According to Schechner, "set time"²⁵⁶ is a time pattern imposed on an event that is a fixed span of time during which a performance is completed. With set time as in a football match, events begin and end at a certain moment no matter how much action has been completed. Set time may involve a "race against the clock"²⁵⁷ or as Pearson states, events occurring in fixed durations, "may lead to a different sense of urgency and quality of energetic engagement."²⁵⁸ *Where Do We Go From Here* occurred over 24 hours spread over four days and the aim was to clear as much pathway as possible. Coincidentally, about 24 meters of pathway was cleared which averaged one meter per hour of work. Although I had agreed not to finish the performance until the pond was completed, set time is deployed in

²⁵⁴ Kirby, 'Happenings: An Introduction', pp. 1-28.

²⁵⁵ Schechner, *Public Domain*, p. 75.

²⁵⁶ Schechner, *Public Domain*, p. 74.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 160.

the performances of *Man Digs Pond* since the aim is to finish the pond within the twenty-four hour duration of the performance. One review entitled, “Twenty-four hours to make a pond, non-stop,”²⁵⁹ was structured around certain clock-times that were significant for the reviewer:

... it is 5pm on Saturday, and armed with a spade, he methodically starts to cut out squares of grass ... 8pm: the staff of the Theatre are serving mulled wine to the spectators, who admire the physicality of the artist’s performance as he tirelessly digs; sweating, despite the cold ... 9pm: the singer Paulette Wright and guitarist Vincent Roubach arrive for a much appreciated musical contribution ... 5pm: end of the performance the audience danced around the pond before the applause!²⁶⁰

Yet, the same reviewer acknowledged the privileging of the task over the clock: “The rules: he will not say a word and he won’t stop until the pond is finished.” I had explicitly agreed to keep going until the pond was completed, so the process-orientated temporality of event time, where all steps in a series of actions must be completed, was the determining time frame in which the set time of twenty-four hours established a narrative tension.

The time frame of twenty-four hours in *Man Digs Pond* is nonmatrixed in the sense that there is no reference to an imaginary time except perhaps the projected time the construction will take. The event really does occur over twenty-four hours and the pond, once constructed, is designed to exist and continue to develop in its ‘own time’ as a result of the weather and surrounding fauna and flora and as a feature of the landscape for years to come.

Despite the extended durations, the focus on the ‘everyday’ and the tendency towards nonmatrixed structures of time, place and character that Kaprow’s work embodies, it shares one important element with more traditional theatre practice. A durational characteristic of performance practice involving the living human being is its ephemerality. No matter how long a live performance lasts, ninety minutes or three years, once the performance has finished it is gone. It may be documented, remembered, repeated, re-staged, re-produced or as Kaprow prefers; “reinvented”²⁶¹ as some of his work continues to be²⁶² (despite his resistance to repetition) but an iteration of a live

²⁵⁹ Lapeyre, “Vingt-quatre heures en non-stop pour créer un bassin” See Appendix 8

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ “I say reinventions, rather than reconstructions, because the works ... differ markedly from their originals. Intentionally so. As I wrote in notes to one of them, they were planned to change each time they were remade. This decision, made in the late 50s, was the polar opposite of the traditional belief that the physical art object—the painting, photo, music composition, etc.—should be fixed in a permanent form.” From Jeff Kelley, ‘Re-Membering’, in Allan Kaprow, *7 Environments*, (Milan/Naples: Fondazione Mudima, Studio Morra, 1991), p.23.

²⁶² For example, *Fluids* has been reinvented on at least three occasions since 2005:

performance, unlike the re-playing of filmed or digitally recorded performance or the repeated viewing of a painting or sculpture, will never be a precise copy of a previous showing. If traditional theatre announces its demise with the close of a curtain, *Fluids* celebrates both its duration and ephemerality by highlighting the melting of ice that leaves no material trace of the labour and social activity that went into the performance, even if there are groupings and friendships that might endure after the event.

Intriguingly, the ephemerality that offers common ground between Kaprow's work and more traditional forms of live performance like the scripted, rehearsed theatre show and the work of TLT is perhaps resisted in my own performance experiments. A pond resists its demise by a continuing emergence that is signalled to people who attend to it, long after the human performers have gone home. Richard and Cameron carried on the work they had witnessed during *Where Do We Go From Here?* Schechner sees in the ephemerality of *Fluids* an attack on private ownership. Kaprow sees in *Fluids*, a comment on planned obsolescence, mass production and the market economy, "within which everything quickly grinds down only to be replaced by something else."²⁶³ It could be argued that the projected duration of the pond that is celebrated in *Man Digs Pond* affirms traditional notions of architectural accomplishment rather than critiquing capitalist notions of production and success. The intention is rather to suggest environmental repair, growth or regeneration and to highlight a different kind of 'non-instrumentalised' labour where something is constructed, not to be replaced by a newer version but to grow with the people that attend to it before, during and after the work that goes into its construction. The actions of Richard and Cameron after *Where Do We Go From Here?*, the diggers after *Turning The Earth*, traders during three years of *Trading Dirt* and Gomes da Silva after *Man Digs Pond* in Reims evidence the enduring nature of the exchanges that the performance of digging encourages. Their actions after the 'show' are expressions of their way of dwelling through their taskscape and are negotiations with the ecology of the place.

To mark the opening of Art Unlimited in Basle, *FLUIDS* was reinvented by the Department of Art and Design at Basle's University of Applied Sciences and the University Basle. Three ice structures were built on 13th June 2005. See: <http://www.art-agenda.com/shows/allan-kaprow-fluids-19672005/> Accessed 4th September, 2014.

On April 25, 26, and 27, 2008, with the exhibition *Allan Kaprow—Art As Life* presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, *Fluids* was recreated by teams of volunteers at around twenty sites across Los Angeles. See: <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/fluids-happening-allan-kaprow> Accessed 4th September, 2014.

Fluids was reinvented at Tate Modern, London, England, for 'UBS Openings: Saturday Live. Happening Again: Allan Kaprow's Fluids and Scales' with Volunteers From Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2008. For Photographic Record, see: <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/35/allan-kaprow/images-clips/5/> Accessed 4th September, 2014.

²⁶³ Kaprow, 'Extensions in Time and Space', p. 223.

Labour

It was not merely the quantity of time that the construction of the pond took but the quality of experience during that time that generated meaning. It was, perhaps, what Scheer describes as “the lived experience of the body engaged in a particular task”²⁶⁴ that concerned the spectators and those involved in the production of the events. Many wondered if the physical demands of working without sleep for twenty-four hours in November would harm me. This concern was reflected in the care of many people who brought me drinks and food throughout the event in Reims and London and by the Technical Director in Reims, Simon Scrive who organised a mechanical digger as back-up. There was interest in the demands made upon the body; its frailty and limits, and its capacity to endure through extended periods of digging. Likewise, the struggle to handle spades designed for adults generated tensions among younger participants of *Where Do We Go From Here?* that also concerned parents who watched and photographed their kids at work (see 4’02” – 4’34” on video documentation). There are economic rules that surround the event such as the payment of travel expenses and provision of artist’s refreshments but here the labour of digging is not wage labour. It is rather a self-realising activity in the pursuit of a collective ambition to improve access to a public space.

For Kaprow and for all the digging experiences described in this chapter, all that is required of the digger is the act rather than ‘acting.’ In *Man Digs Pond* the difficulty of the act of digging over an unusually extended duration creates a tension that concerns both performer and audience. It would be wrong to suggest that these events and the transactions they encourage are not deliberately constructed and that there is no imaginative leap of faith required of participants. However, the exhaustion that I experienced during *Man Digs Pond* did not require any leap of imagination to make manifest. I was not pretending to be exhausted since the extended duration of digging really had left me very tired. I certainly made no effort to conceal my exhaustion like I might have done had I been portraying an immensely fit, heroic, or skilled digger. The awareness that I *was* performing was always there. Elements of the off-stage self, such as the physical features of an actor, are revealed in every staged performance, and there is, therefore, always a mixture of a constructed character and the off-stage self. I am not

²⁶⁴ Edward Scheer, ‘Introduction: The End of Spatiality or the Meaning of Duration’ in *Performance Research: On Duration* 17 (5), 2012 p.1.

arguing that one is any more real than the other. Rather, I am arguing that the work I describe here, through its location and emphasis, highlights the everyday labours of our lived experience.

Communities of Performer and Audience

Kaprow was part of the politicised artistic community of New York City that encouraged Julian Beck and other visual artists, such as Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine, to turn to performance as a medium for their work. The late 1950s New York creative community witnessed what Rodenbeck describes as “the fundamentally theatrical expansions of painting and compositional practices.”²⁶⁵ Both Dine and Oldenburg took part in a panel at the Club Avant-Garde Theatre with TLT and Kaprow who donated an audiotape from a 1957 ‘environment’ to the company for use in a performance.²⁶⁶ It is clear that TLT found inspiration in Kaprow’s Happenings. Beck echoes Kaprow’s motivations in the turn from painting to performance: “To devote my time to the more social art of the theatre”.²⁶⁷ Actors from TLT turned up at Kaprow’s *18 Happenings*, hoping to work with him. Yet, despite shared artistic, social and political concerns highlighted by a common desire to break down separations between audience and artist, Kaprow and TLT could not work together because they were unable to reconcile a fundamentally opposed mode of thinking about performance and the role of the artist.

This divergence might be viewed from the perspective of Kaprow’s rejection of the cultural and economic infrastructure of the theatre building as well as the physical and ontological distinction between art and life and artist and audience that is encouraged by the division of stage and auditorium. Kaprow’s performance was explicitly non-theatrical performance, most obviously in his rejection of the theatre space but also in his rejection of spectacle, linear narrative and imaginary constructions of character, time and place.

The practice of Kaprow analysed above traces a general trend over twenty-five years that can be summarised by his move from the highly constructed, controlled, choreographed and scripted environments of *18 Happenings*, where a seated audience, under careful instruction, view the unfolding of fragmented assemblages of text, sound, movement and image over ninety minutes, through the focussed, participatory, public,

²⁶⁵ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p.133.

²⁶⁶ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p.132.

²⁶⁷ Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes*, p.153 as a citation from ‘Julian Beck as Painter’ in *Arts* 61, no. 3 November 1986: 32.

directed group activity of *Fluids* over three days, to the more private, relatively unplanned, rambling, open-ended action of *Trading Dirt* over three years. The progression of time scales manifested here; from ninety minutes to three days to three years suggests a gradual slowing down of Kaprow's performance practices and an enduring interest in the ways that the experience and duration of tasks can impact upon the reception of an artwork.

My own practice does not follow such a linear pattern of emergence. It has developed from extended everyday digging practices in a small park with free public access into the garden of a theatre. In the following chapters I examine the ways in which digging can be presented in the art gallery context that Kaprow rejected. The duration of digging and the relationship between digger, seer and the place of performance in my own experiments has developed as a result of the labour of scholarship and developed according to the economic and ecological status of the community and place of performance but Kaprow has taught me to see the community of a theatre or university as an everyday place of labour like any other with its own specific rules, histories and spatial conditions.

For Artaud, the audience is not separated from the action but experiences it, body and mind. The action itself moves throughout the space and "startling combinations" of rhythm, sound and action activate the space.

New imagery speaks, even if composed in words. But spatial, thundering images replete with sound also speak, if we become versed in arranging a sufficient interjection of spatial areas furnished with silence and stillness.²⁶⁸

In other words, thundering images and sounds only have meaning if they are spatially arranged with contrasting spaces of silence and stillness. Like Schechner, who seeks the ordinary, the theatrical, the ritualistic *and* the political in the same show, Artaud's total theatre called for a clash of contrasting forms in theatrical space. The parade before *Turning The Earth* through the streets of Pittsburgh clashed with the traditional parade in the audio landscape of the video. Heightened action and sound contrasted with periods of silence and stillness yet even in silence the physical tensions of each performer remained largely fixed or frozen in that moment. There was no change from ritual to the ordinary until the performers began chatting with the audience after the 'show'. For Kaprow's later work, and for my own experiments described above, heterogeneous experiences and

²⁶⁸ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.66.

dialogic transactions between audience and performer constitute an essential part of the show rather than a useful epilogue to the main action.

The Place of Performance

Scholars and practitioners of Site-specific theatre including Mike Pearson and Emma Govan²⁶⁹ have drawn on Timothy Ingold's 'taskscape' to theorise the ways in which landscape interacts with human action through time to give meaning, ambience and character to a place and its ecology. For my performances, for Ingold and for the Happenings of Alan Kaprow in 1960s America that helped to generate the interconnected contemporary practices of 'performance theatre', 'site-specific theatre', 'land art' and 'live art': meaning is generated through mutually constitutive engagement during the unfolding of multiple temporalities at the intersections between the shifting and emergent ecologies of the site, spectators and performance of digging.

The locations of *Man Digs Pond* are not imaginary but acknowledged as the garden of a theatre in Reims or AMG in London. Of course, there are matrixed structures in the performances: costume, lighting, the pond, interventions from singers, and publicity such as posters and leaflets and there is an ebb and flow of signs between these structures and the chancy durations of the site and the labour of digging that underpin the performance and continue to influence human interactions with the pond after the event.

All the performances I consider here are inevitably constructed and considered to a certain degree. As soon as a performance is announced and programmed it is subject to the constructed frames of scheduling and the institutional constructs that permit, select and support the event. The emerging scenography of pond, though subject to the chance effects of weather and human capacity is deliberate, carefully structured, scheduled and planned. It could be argued that completely nonmatrixed performing is neither desirable nor possible since there are inevitably actions, sounds or images that are only occurring because they are part of a planned event. I am not arguing for performance that refuses the constructions that delineate it from everyday life. I argue instead that it is the flux of signs passing between the 'found' and the constructed elements of the performance that generate tensions and drama. Social transactions arising from the tensions between the 'character' and the off-stage self, the urban landscape and the landscape as performance

²⁶⁹ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance, Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 139 – 149.

space, between the task of digging and constructed narratives, and between clock-time and the time it takes for things to happen, generate experiences that negotiate our ways of dwelling in a place.

In the next Chapter and the analysis of the land art of Agnes Denes, there are further extensions of creative activity through time and space. Her installations are sometimes designed to endure for hundreds of years and colonise a whole mountain. Denes digs through the everyday remainders of industrialised urban living: landfill sites or disused mines to propose future ways of dwelling and focus on environmental repair, regeneration and care. Kaprow's work speaks about the economic relationships that define the social texture of life under capitalism. Denes's focus is on the ecological relationships between earth, air and water that in the city are usually denied by concrete, tarmac and metal. When she digs through the ecologies of the city, Denes also digs into the economic rules that have benefitted some but for many have led to water and food shortages, mass migration to escape wars and the poisoning of earth, air and water that are symptoms of the ecological disaster facing us all. Kaprow was able to keep a certain distance from the economic institutions he critiqued by dwelling in the academy. Denes reaches out to a larger constituency but in widening her audience her creative digging practice has sometimes been controlled by the economic institutions that she seeks to confront and I argue the ecological processes her art embodies are likewise appropriated by the economic forces that have given rise to the crisis.

Chapter Three

The Ecologies of Digging and Dwelling, the Anthropocene and Digging as Resistance to the Geological Force of Capital

Introduction

Critical analysis of the land art of Agnes Denes in this chapter provides a lens through which to understand how the action of digging can foreground the transactions between earth, air and water that constitute the ecologies that are often denied in the context of dwelling in the city. I ask how highlighting these processes by digging can suggest strategies of resistance to the economies that lead to environmental degradation and can point towards ecologies and economies of care, repair and regeneration.

Part A examines Denes's interest in combining art with science and particularly the earth sciences that are concerned with the lithosphere (the Earth's outer shell), the hydrosphere (the sphere of water) and the atmosphere (the Earth's gaseous outer layer). A thesis concerned with digging beneath the surface to make a pond, plant a tree or clear a path is, like geologists, archaeologists, farmers and gravediggers, unavoidably interested in the lithosphere. When a hole is dug for a pond, materials previously hidden beneath the surface are revealed and exposed to the atmosphere and water then fills the hole. What the earth sciences teach us and what Denes highlights using ponds dug through landfill and filled with methane-digesting algae in *Rising Pink Clouds*²⁷⁰ (1978) is that earth, air and water are in a fluid state of transactional dialogue and, as Ingold would have it, these transactions sustain all life on the planet.

Rising Pink Clouds exists only as a short written outline, but proposes a way that a pond can perform to mitigate the polluting effects of human landfill. Algae in the pond filters harmful elements in methane produced by decomposing garbage and produces pink clouds that drift over the site. I speculate about how the concept might be scaled up to the size of the Gulf of Mexico to imagine its operation in the context of the Deepwater Horizon oil and methane spill in 2010. *Rising Pink Clouds* is revisited at the end of the section in the context of the highest geological formation on the East coast of the United States; Fresh Kills Landfill. Fresh Kills received the waste of New York City for decades and debris from the collapse of The Twin Towers in 2001. Today, methane escaping from the site is collected for use in nearby homes. I imagine it being 'wasted': fed through ponds and emitting pink smoke that drifts over Manhattan (and in part B over The School of Arts at Birkbeck).

²⁷⁰ Agnes Denes, *The Human Argument, The Writings of Agnes Denes*, Klaus Ottman (ed), (Putnam Conn: Spring Publications, 2008) p. 271.

This section analyses Denes's vision of an ecological art that reflects the large scale of the ecological crisis by the creation of artworks extending over vast areas of time and place. *Tree Mountain - A Living Time Capsule* (1982-1996, Ylöjärvi, Finland) involved 11,000 people, the creation of a mountain and digging holes for 11,000 trees that have been safeguarded by the state for 400 years.²⁷¹ *Tree Mountain* represents the most extensive project described in this thesis in terms of place, duration and participation but this chapter questions whether such mass participation necessarily allows the artist's vision to translate into the experience of the thousands of diggers.

With *Wheatfield a Confrontation* (1982) Denes illuminates the ways that digging in the city can call into question the operation of both local ecologies and the global economy when she digs through landfill at a situated distance from tens of thousands of office workers who can witness the process. In the shadows of the Twin Towers of The World Trade Centre she points at investment banks and corporations who control our ecologies and geologies and permit or deny the action of digging. *Wheatfield* on Manhattan Island is brought together with *Rising Pink Clouds* in the later stages of this section to offer a visual manifestation of the now widely accepted term: the Anthropocene, a concept developed by geologists to accommodate into their schema the changes to the lithosphere caused by human interventions such as landfill, deforestation, monoculture, fossil fuel extraction and burning. In 2008, the Anthropocene provided what geologists Zalasiewicz et al described as "an informal metaphor of global environmental change".²⁷² By 2015 Britain's Royal Geographic Society gave their annual conference the theme of "Geographies of the Anthropocene" and its form and causes are a growing concern of earth scientists and humanities scholars.

The Anthropogenic geological narrative lays the blame for ecological catastrophe on humanity as a whole. This section asks how the performance of digging can enact a critique of this theory illustrated by the geological processes at play on Manhattan Island before, during and after Denes's *Wheatfield, a Confrontation*. I argue that it is the economic rules of the house and the minority who amass great wealth from those rules that are transforming our ecologies and our geologies, not all of humanity. When *Wheatfield* is restaged during the corporate jamboree, Milan Expo 2015, the word 'confrontation' is deleted from the title offering evidence that Denes's ecological art and the mass

²⁷¹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 166-169.

²⁷² Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams et al, 'Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?' *GSA Today*, 18. 2, Feb 2008. p. 7.

performance of digging can also be appropriated by and add value to the corporate forces that she might seek to critique.

I conclude part A of this chapter by examining how ecological processes are revealed and negotiated in my own experiments with digging in the light of Denes and the Anthropocene. Comparing the large scale of Denes's installations with my smaller localised experiments, I ask why the power of the performance of digging to transform, affirm and build capacity is not dependant on the amplification of participation in the performance of digging but rather the ability of the artist to deploy skills to generate, in the words of Rancière; "heterogeneous performances that are translated into one another."²⁷³ Rancière sees the performer as also a spectator and translator of other people's stories and also as a *researcher*; observing, listening, delving into previously unknown worlds and revealing the stories that run through a place and the knowledge of a community while at the same time keeping an eye out for the ways the performance might play out for a different community in another time and another place. I have evidenced in chapters one and two how my performances are translated into the stories and experience of others such as John John in AMG and Corinne Gomes da Silva in Reims. In part B of this chapter, I ask how the performance of digging can translate into the experiences, histories and narratives that run through the place and community of the university.

Part B examines the development of my own digging practice in the light of Denes and in the context of dwelling in the School of Arts at Birkbeck. I ask how digging can be experienced within the regulatory, economic, ecological, historical and social frameworks of the university that coalesce around one of the many esteemed former residents of the buildings that house the School: the economist John Maynard Keynes. I ask how Keynes used the idea of digging through urban garbage to critique the free market model that reserves government expenditure for the support of war and mining to the detriment of expenditure on things like affordable housing. I examine a speculative pond dig and *Rising Pink Clouds* in the context of the Keynes Library, and a back courtyard at Birkbeck's School of Arts in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, Central London.

²⁷³ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.22.

Part A - Critical Case Study

Agnes Denes, The Performance of Digging Through the Ecologies of The City: Participation, Proximity and Resistance

Julian Beck, Allan Kaprow and Agnes Denes spent part of their professional lives as painters and all three rejected the spatial limitations of the picture frame, studio and art gallery in favour of the more social activity of art in the sphere of the everyday. Given Beck's enthusiasm for the social labour of creating the garden after *Turning the Earth* in Pittsburgh one could imagine a scenario in which he gave up theatre to be a gardener. He saw the creation of the garden and accompanying dialogic transactions as a more social action than the performance of digging during the 'show'. Kaprow searched for a social art that engages with the everyday, and he pursued private, quiet events like *Trading Dirt* that became public only in their re-telling. Kaprow did all the digging in *Trading Dirt* but the conversations and transactions framing the dig are evidence of its social nature. Critical analysis of TLT and Kaprow focuses on the human experience: tasks, the performance of actions and the transactions between the artist, the place and the audience. As I will evidence below Agnes Denes offers a further example of a painter who challenged the spatial confines of the canvas to produce work that engages with everyday places and communities but Denes emphasises the transformation of the taskscape and through the action of digging explores the ecological relationships between humans and the other living and non-living things with which humans dwell.

The large scale of her work inevitably involves the participation and/or proximity of far larger communities than other work considered here and I will examine the

consequences of this scale in terms of the way her artworks are received and their ability to negotiate the ways we dwell or might dwell through the landscape. Her focus is on ecology but she also engages with and sometimes confronts powerful economic forces that resonate in a place. I argue here that it is those economic forces: the corporate powers, the politicians who subsidise them and the forces of capital that have brought about the ecological crisis by digging up the earth's deposits of fossilised carbon and burning them into the atmosphere.

Firstly I will examine a work that can be experienced by an entire city by emitting clouds of pink smoke from ponds dug through mountains of garbage: *Rising Pink Clouds*.²⁷⁴ This project also allows me to outline an important distinction between the work of Denes and the artists mentioned to date (including myself), a distinction that can be summarised by the importance Denes places on the blending of art with science and particularly the earth sciences.

***Rising Pink Clouds* (1978)**

Rising Pink Clouds exists as a short written outline as the only testament to the labour involved in its creation but in terms of exploring the possibilities of what and where a pond might be and the ways it might relate to the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and community in which it dwells, Denes digs very deeply indeed.

The project is designed for post-industrial wastelands such as abandoned mines and landfill that have methane trapped beneath the surface. Small wells are dug near methane concentrations and are filled with algae that absorb and filter out toxins from the methane. A harmless chemical is added to the ponds producing a pink cloud of smoke whenever the purified methane is vented. Denes gives no details about how the ponds would retain their water and algae while allowing methane to vent through them or what chemical agent might be used to produce pink smoke. What distinguishes this work from the work of Kaprow, Beck and myself, at least in Denes's own short concept outline, is the explicit reference to ecological processes and the absence of the human body.

One can imagine the human labour in the materialisation of *Rising Pink Clouds*; the selection of a site, obtaining permissions, funding, the unpleasant dangerous labour of digging and the installation, monitoring and maintenance of biological ecosystems including

²⁷⁴ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 271.

artificial colouring agents. Yet for Denes the emphasis is not on the labour or live performance of the human but the performance of the things left over after human dwelling: methane, landfill, abandoned mines, pond and algae. In Denes's concept purified methane in particular takes the starring role in pink.

Methane is less concentrated in the atmosphere than Carbon Dioxide and remains in the atmosphere for a shorter time frame (c. 10 years) but it is a more potent greenhouse gas (GHG).²⁷⁵ Methane is released into the atmosphere by coal, oil and natural gas production, livestock rearing and the decay of organic matter. It traps outgoing radiation from the earth's surface causing the earth's temperature to rise. In 2008 methane was considered by William Ruddiman to be responsible for around 16% of the total greenhouse gas effect during the industrial era.²⁷⁶

Denes asks us to consider methane and the general human waste of landfill sites that produces it. In *Rising Pink Clouds* algae is used to mitigate its harmful effects so we are also encouraged to consider the ability of naturally occurring, non-human life forms to repair human degradation. There is a sense, with the algae's process of methane purification that the excesses of human production made apparent by reference to the landfill can be repaired with the help of non-human agents rather than through further, potentially damaging human intervention. Denes's pond digs deep into the ecological processes of things rather than attempting to draw attention to the social ecologies generated by the human labour of digging.

Denes's pond provokes a response by raising questions about the exploitation and degradation of the atmosphere and lithosphere and at the same time uses algae to clean up some of the mess. *Rising Pink Clouds* is a carefully considered scientific experiment as much as art work and considering the inadvertent release of methane in the Gulf of Mexico thirty two years after Denes conceived of the project, her proposal has a disturbing prophetic quality. I sketch below the catastrophe of the Deepwater Horizon oilrig as a scaled up version of *Rising Pink Clouds* and as an illustration of the ways that methane is released into the atmosphere by the corporate powers that control our lithosphere, atmosphere and hydrosphere. The disaster lays the foundation for my critique of the Anthropocene: a geological narrative that lays the blame for the Deepwater Horizon and the continuing growth in carbon emissions on a universal human propensity to dig up and

²⁷⁵ See US Environmental Protection Agency Website:
<https://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gwps.html>

²⁷⁶ William F. Ruddiman, *Earth's Climate, Past and Future*, (W.H. Freeman and Co., New York, 2008). pp. 330-331.

burn fossil fuels. Such a narrative lets the corporations who control our ecologies off the hook because if everyone is to blame, how can particular culprits be called to account?

Though we may be familiar with the large scale oil leak, the massive release of colourless methane gas is less well documented and the ways the two pollutants were controlled chimes with an ecological narrative that Denes was exploring in 1978 when she wrote the paragraph that is the concept for *Rising Pink Clouds*.

On 20th April 2010 on the Deepwater Horizon oil-drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, methane gas under high pressure ignited in the rig causing an explosion that killed eleven workers.²⁷⁷ The rig sank and oil and methane gas leaked into the sea from the blown well for 87 days. In total 4.1 billion barrels of oil spilled into the sea. Some oil was removed, burned off, or dispersed naturally but around 60% of the spilled oil was treated with a chemical dispersant. The dispersant removes the oil from the water's surface and causes it to disperse beneath in large plumes. In the case of the Deepwater Horizon 1.84 million US gallons of an experimental dispersant was used: Corexit. Tests have established the many harmful effects of Corexit and suggest the toxicity level of treated oil is 52 times higher than untreated oil.²⁷⁸ The oil and dispersant remain suspended in the sea or sink to the ocean floor causing unknown damage to deep-water marine ecologies.

The leak also involved the release of 200,000 metric tons of methane into the sea. There was no known method of removing the methane that was dissolved in the seawater and would be released sooner or later into the atmosphere where it would contribute to greenhouse gas levels.²⁷⁹ Levels of methane in the Gulf rose to 100,000 times the normal level.²⁸⁰ What surprised some scientists was the disappearance of the excess methane a few months after the leak was capped. According to scientists at Texas A&M University and University of California at Santa Barbara the methane was consumed by naturally occurring bacterial blooms before it could be released into the atmosphere.²⁸¹ Within six months of the leak, levels of methane in the seawater were back to pre-leak levels.

²⁷⁷ From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater_Horizon_oil_spill, Accessed 25/02/2015.

²⁷⁸ Roberto Rico-Martínez, Terry W. Snell, Tonya L. Shearer. 'Synergistic toxicity of Macondo crude oil and dispersant Corexit 9500A® to the Brachionus plicatilis species complex (Rotifera).' *Environmental Pollution*. Vol. 173, Feb 2013, pp.5-10, Accessed 23rd February 2015, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0269749112004344>.

²⁷⁹ Methane is the main constituent of natural gas and is 34 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. See: Roger Real Drouin, 'On Fracking Front, A Push To Reduce Leaks of Methane', *Yale Environment 360*, 2014, Accessed 23rd February 2015, http://e360.yale.edu/feature/on_fracking_front_a_push_to_reduce_leaks_of_methane/2754/

²⁸⁰ John D. Kessler, David L. Valentine et al 'A Persistent Oxygen Anomaly Reveals the Fate of Spilled Methane in the Deep Gulf of Mexico', *Science*, 21 January 2011, p. 312. Published online 6 January 2011. Accessed 23rd February 2015.

²⁸¹ Kessler et al, 'A Persistent Oxygen Anomaly' pp. 312-315.

Substitute a small pond for the Gulf of Mexico, bubbles of vented methane for a massive torrent of pressurised methane, puffs of pink smoke for a deadly fireball and the smoke from the burning of spilled oil and gas. Finally, substitute pond algae for vast seaborne methane-digesting bacterial blooms. With *Rising Pink Clouds* and the Deepwater Horizon disaster, the ecological relevance of Denes's work is made apparent. The lesson of both events is that ecological damage can be repaired, not by the same kind of human intervention that caused the problem and makes matters worse but by collaboration with the earth's existing agents of repair. I am not arguing that it doesn't matter how much poison we release into the biosphere because the earth will clear up the mess. I am arguing that humans must generate knowledge about how our ecologies can allow humans to dwell on the planet for generations to come.

On-going research by the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative suggests that oil is consumed by certain bacteria that thrive in oil-rich environments.²⁸² Caroline Johansen reveals that the relatively small amounts of oil that seep naturally through the seafloor are actually "necessary for many organisms to survive".²⁸³ Rather than increasing the toxicity of oil-spills with toxic man-made chemicals, there is a call from Denes in 1978 for more research on the naturally occurring life-forms that are able to do the job for us: "A more recent variation on this idea is the use of methane-eating microbes."²⁸⁴ My point is that the Deepwater Horizon oil and methane spill reflects the processes at play in Denes's *Rising Pink Clouds*.

Rising Pink Clouds

Site: industrial wasteland, pond
Methane: controlled venting through pond water

Methane purified by algae in water

Pink smoke signifies the process of repair

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Site: blown oil well, Gulf of Mexico
Methane and oil: accidentally released at high pressure on the seabed 5,000 feet below the surface
Methane digested by bacterial blooms in water
Oil collected, burned-off or dispersed using Corexit
Black smoke from burning methane and oil signify damage

The above table shows how the real life disaster of Deepwater Horizon imitated Denes's *Rising Pink Clouds* but on a scale that even Denes would be impressed by. Her work has helped me assess the ways that a pond can function in the absence of the human performer as the performative embodiment of an ecological narrative: a narrative that unpicks some of the very pertinent questions about the earth's ecologies, climate change

²⁸² Caroline Johansen, 'How Oil Feeds the Deep Sea', *The Ocean Blog*, Accessed 23/02/2015

<http://ocean.si.edu/blog/how-oil-feeds-deep-sea>,

²⁸³ Johansen, 'How Oil Feeds the Deep Sea'

²⁸⁴ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p.271.

and industrial production. As an art object, its most clearly defined visual imagery comes from the clouds of pink smoke. Their pinkness seems to draw attention to the artificiality of the added chemical and to remind the viewer of the human hand in ecological degradation.

For Denes the labour of the pond's construction is ignored in favour of the remainders of human activity: decomposing garbage and methane. For the ponds I construct, the social activity of digging is highlighted and the remainder is designed to generate social experiences and new transactions between earth, air and water. Both projects offer strategies of repair and though there may be nostalgia for a forgotten 'natural' ideal in my ponds, I see the process of construction as representing a refocusing of our priorities and a suggestion of how we might act together in a future without fossil fuels.

Unlike Denes's ponds in 'Rising Pink Clouds', the ponds I have created so far are designed to encourage 'wildlife.' That is, they are meant to provide habitat for flora and fauna that might have been present on the site at some point in the past but have been evicted under the pressures of urbanisation and unable to recolonize. A pond provides a host of benefits to many species that choose it as a place to dwell. In a sense, my ponds resist human dwelling and replace it with an idealised 'nature', whereas Denes does a more complex job of using ponds to clear up the mess of human dwelling by importing carefully chosen objects and life forms. As a healer and visionary, Denes describes herself as an artist and "modern day shaman"²⁸⁵ in the sense that she heals through the performance of her visions. In the same breath she also describes herself as "a new breed of scientific and technological seer"²⁸⁶ and it is her embrace of mathematics, physics, geology, biology and chemistry that enables Denes to reveal the ecological crisis and new ways of dwelling on the planet.

Despite reminders and remainders of human dwelling and digging, it is the materials themselves; algae, pond and smoke that are performing in *Rising Pink Clouds*. In all the other performances I consider here and in other ecological art works by Denes, such as *Tree Mountain - A Living Time Capsule, 11,000 trees, 11,000 people, 400 years* (1982-1996, Ylöjärvi, Finland)²⁸⁷ the human performance of digging is central to the concept and the human hand remains an integral part of its continuing development for its intended duration.

²⁸⁵ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 219.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 166 - 169.

Tree Mountain - A Living Time Capsule, 11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years

Tree Mountain is a collaborative project on many levels. Conceived in 1982 it was commissioned by the Finnish government at the World Environment Day at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro on July 5th 1992.²⁸⁸ Denes notes the collaboration of contractors and the United Nations Environment Program and the negotiations necessary to persuade individuals and administrative bodies to commit to such an unusual artwork and land use. The Finnish Government was persuaded to protect the site for 400 years so the artwork involves, not only the labour of 11,000 tree planters, but also the collaboration of those charged with its protection during future generations. It is therefore a durational work that operates on a timescale similar to the lifetime of a tree or the lifetime of several humans.

Though the size and shape of the work could be adapted to suit different sites the design calls for the trees to be planted according to an intricate pattern derived from a mathematical formula on a man-made mountain on reclaimed land. In Finland, the elliptical mountain was constructed on an old gravel pit and measured 420 meters long, 270 meters wide and 28 meters high.²⁸⁹ The patterned layout of the trees (like the pattern of a pineapple skin) emphasises the human hand in the project and is designed to survive the growing forest's thinning out after a few decades and remain a feature for as long as the trees survive.

For Denes, *Tree Mountain* begins after the digging is done and wildlife takes over. It is a study of both the effects of time on a work of art and on attitudes to art over time. The project's continuing development over 400 years makes Kaprow's three-year long *Trading Dirt* appear fleeting. If performance maker, visual artist and novelist Tim Etchells sees in durational work, "a sense that through time the life becomes the work"²⁹⁰, then in *Tree Mountain* Denes is handing over responsibility for the project to future generations and there is a sense that through time, many lifetimes become the work. Such a long projection into the future encourages the viewer to imagine how the work will be viewed in four hundred years. Perhaps it will be seen as the precursor to a million ecological art-works or tree-planting projects on a similar scale that remain as beacons of carbon consumption and

²⁸⁸ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 169.

²⁸⁹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 166.

²⁹⁰ Tim Etchells, 'When Theatre is the Time of Your Life'. *Guardian Theatre Blog*, 27th February 2009, (Accessed 5th September 2016): <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2009/feb/27/theatre-time-life>

oxygen production. As Denes contests, the work measures the evolution of art as attitudes to it change perhaps emerging from, “a curiosity to being a shrine, from being the possible remnants of a decadent era to being one of the monuments of a great civilization – a monument not built to the human ego but to benefit future generations with a meaningful legacy.”²⁹¹

The sentence above reflects a paradox that runs through Denes’s work and my own performance experiments. In every art work there is a tension between the creative artist’s idea of their own self and the reception of the work by the ‘other’. The idea that *Tree Mountain* is ‘not built to the human ego’ would perhaps be an overstatement. Its scale reflects the large numbers of people who, to a certain degree would need to stand behind and support the lone figure of the artist as creative force. As Denes puts it, for an artist to act fearlessly, independently and with the certainty and confidence necessary for creation, the ego must remain intact.²⁹² When Denes declares herself “a pioneer of ecological environmental art”²⁹³ she may well be right but she also displays a very clear and directed view of her own self, while perhaps failing to acknowledge those that came before and those that did the digging.

In 1982, the same year that Denes conceived of *Tree Mountain*,²⁹⁴ Joseph Beuys organised the planting of 7,000 oak trees in Kassel, Germany in an effort to reforest the city.²⁹⁵ Beuys had been conducting urban tree planting actions since 1971 to draw attention to the need for new ecological plans for cities.²⁹⁶ In Kassel, anyone could participate by sponsoring a tree for US\$ 210. Each sponsor received a signed certificate stating, “small oak trees grow and life continues”.²⁹⁷ Students helped plant the trees, each one next to a four-foot tall locally mined basalt obelisk, the solidity and permanence of the stone in a contrasting coexistence with the seasonal changes, movement and growth of the tree.²⁹⁸ The project in Kassel in 1982 was part of ‘Documenta 7’, the international art exhibition that happens in the city every five years. Beuys died in 1986 with 5,500 trees planted. His son Wenzel planted the 7,000th tree at ‘Documenta 8’ in 1987.

²⁹¹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 168-169.

²⁹² Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 199.

²⁹³ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 199.

²⁹⁴ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 167.

²⁹⁵ Sue Spaid, *Ecovention*, (Cincinnati: Co-published by greenmuseum.org, The Contemporary Arts Center, ecoartspace, 2002) p. 26.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

It is probable that Denes was aware of Beuys's work, since he was a high profile environmental activist and artist and he was active in Green politics, running for office in Germany in 1976.²⁹⁹ For Beuys, the participants either pay money to sponsor a tree, or self select from an existing student community to help plant the trees and stones. There is a certain commodification of the art work and of the trees themselves since people must pay money for their tree, rather than take responsibility for the labour of planting it which is the case in *Tree Mountain*. Yet in terms of documentation, mediation and artist's participation, the human act of labour is perhaps given greater prominence by Beuys. A brief search of internet images of Beuys will uncover several photographs of him holding a shovel full of earth, digging into the earth or positioning a tree, usually surrounded by a circle of witnesses. In 1983, Beuys represented the Kassel project with a symbol of human labour; a spade leaning against a white wall entitled, *Pala from 7000 Oaks*.³⁰⁰ (*Pala* is Spanish for 'spade' or 'shovel'). In this work, the labour of planting 7,000 trees (not all oaks in the end) and the call for re-forestation can be symbolised by the most basic tool of human labour; a single spade leaning at rest against a white wall. It almost invites the viewer to take up the shovel and dig. I will revisit this image when I bring digging tools into the gallery during a practical experiment at Birkbeck (chapter four). Denes, on the other hand, is focused on the trees themselves rather than the labour of planting and in 1982 represents the intricate patterning of 11,000 trees by drawing each tree individually on a plain white background.³⁰¹

Compared with the documentation of works by Kaprow, Beuys, TLT and my own performance experiments, the artist's body as visible representative of the artist is rarer in Denes's work. Yet, there is at least one published photograph of Denes surrounded by a circle of cameras while she holds a mattock that is cutting into the earth and apparently digging a hole for the planting of the first tree on *Tree Mountain*.³⁰² The fact that Denes chose this moment to be so abundantly documented signals the presence of her own ego in the project, as well as her body, and the central role that the action of digging earth plays materially and symbolically in the performance of the tasks necessary to construct the artwork.

Once the digging is done, the artist's presence perseveres in *Tree Mountain* as the distinctive patterning of the trees and her signature on the certificates received by the

²⁹⁹ Spaid, *Ecovention*, p. 26.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

³⁰¹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 166.

³⁰² Spaid, *Ecovention*, p. 123.

diggers but there is little to remind us of the artist's body or the bodies of the diggers. It is the body of the mountain and the forest itself that demands attention as a hybrid of natural process and mathematical patterning (Figure 3.1).

Tree Mountain heals land that has been degraded, discourages soil erosion and encourages through photosynthesis the consumption of carbon dioxide (the single biggest contributor to global warming) and the release of water and oxygen. Yet the ecological benefits and the gift to future generations are for Denes an extra benefit for in the end, "it is a forest and it is art. It is the human intellect blending with the majesty of nature."³⁰³ These are bold claims and to me a surprising back grounding of the physical labour of digging and social dialogues that are an integral part of the work. It suggests that Denes's interest is primarily in the translation of her own vision into the landscape. The mass tree planting and signed certificates, though signalling the artist's desire for participation in a collective ecological act, in a curious way serve to reinforce the authorial voice of the artist.



Fig. 3.1 (Above) *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule, 11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years*
Image captured from Google earth satellite image accessed 4th Feb 2015

Denes expresses the pleasure she takes in taking her art away from the spatial restrictions of the canvas and economic restrictions of the gallery and into the found locations, dwelling places and processes of the everyday; "Just taking the art out of the machinery of the art world is a joy by itself."³⁰⁴ Like Kaprow, Denes rejects the commercial constraints of the

³⁰³ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 261.

³⁰⁴ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 260.

speculative art market, and challenges the preciousness, commodification and collectability of art.³⁰⁵ The certificates received by the tree planters naming their custodianship³⁰⁶ lends the project a certain level of inheritable commodification but nobody can collect *Tree Mountain* and its public ownership is reinforced by a satellite image of the work, periodically updated on Google earth. Here, another form of commodification allows the work to be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. I wonder if Denes imagined so many possible witnesses to the emerging forest or the emerging avenues for the mobilisation of dissent and ecological thinking that the worldwide web, a product of scientific experiment, is able to offer. Art for Denes is about eliminating boundaries, both spatially and theoretically, “in order to make new associations and valid analogies”.³⁰⁷

Tree Mountain and *Rising Pink Clouds* break theoretical boundaries between art and science. Art, says Denes, is capable of absorbing “key elements from other systems and unifying them into a unique coherent vision”. Her science is not the research tool of industrial, military or commercial expansion but is used to configure the ways in which the earth’s systems are themselves able to repair some of the damage done; “Intelligent restructuring of our environment is imperative.”³⁰⁸ I now turn to a project by Denes that transforms the landscape and emphasises the action of digging to suggest a way artists might respond to the economic rules of the house that have caused the crisis.

Wheatfield - A Confrontation

On May 1st 1982, a few weeks before Beuys began *7000 Oaks* in Kassel, Denes, her two assistants and a number of friends and volunteers began digging furrows by hand to plant a two-acre field of wheat on land reclaimed from The Hudson River in the shadows of the iconic structures of finance and commerce: The Twin Towers of The World Trade Centre in Lower Manhattan.³⁰⁹ After tending, irrigating and spraying the crop with fungicide, over one thousand pounds of wheat was harvested mechanically on 16th August 1982.

The artist and her cohort were physically separated by tens or hundreds of meters from the people who could see the field, so there was little in the way of informal conversation between the diggers and the local community. Nevertheless, the labour of digging furrows for the seeds and the transactions with workers labouring nearby bring into

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 169.

³⁰⁷ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 194.

³⁰⁸ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 195.

³⁰⁹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 164.

focus the ways that even when there is a clear spatial and ontological separation between artist and audience, Denes's practice can be translated into the stories, practices and ways of dwelling of the community. Before examining the social dialogues and transactions that emerged between Denes and the community of Manhattan and by way of offering some background to the project, I will introduce the idea of the 'geological force of capital'.

My contention is that the substances beneath the surface of the earth, our common geologies, are largely controlled, excavated and traded by powerful corporate interests whose primary concern is the generation of profit and wealth for the private individuals and investment banks (the shareholders) who own those companies. I am referring to the mining and oil companies who represent some of the richest economic entities on the planet. In 2014, for example, BP who owned the Deepwater Horizon oilrig had a turnover of US\$ 353 billion and the fifth largest sales figures of any company after Walmart (retail), Sinopec (oil and gas), Royal Dutch Shell (oil and gas) and Exxon Mobil (oil and gas).³¹⁰ Shares in BP are owned by a variety of investment banks and trust funds that manage pension funds and savings for individuals. It is actually very difficult to work out who benefits from the large profits made by the company. In 2010, according to Rand Clifford, just after the Deepwater Horizon oil and methane spill, the largest shareholder of BP was the American investment bank, JPMorgan Chase with about 28% of shares.³¹¹ In turn JPMorgan Chase is owned by a variety of investment institutions including, (in July 2016), the largest shareholder, Morgan Stanley³¹²: an investment bank owned in turn by individuals and further financial institutions. Governments, too, invest in oil companies and subsidise them with public money that allows them to sell fuel and plastics at a lower cost than would otherwise be possible. Anyone in the UK who has a pension fund will also have a likely interest in oil and gas companies and anyone who pays tax will be contributing to subsidies that support these companies but decisions on how this money is actually spent and how profits are distributed are made by the management teams of the companies not the individuals who provide their capital (though it is normal for managers and directors to have large shareholdings of the companies they work for).

³¹⁰ Note: 'Turnover' is the total value of all sales in one year. Source: Forbes Global 2000, Biggest Public Companies List: <http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/29/#header:revenue>

³¹¹ Rand Clifford, 'Who Actually Owns BP?' *Global Research* website: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/who-actually-owns-bp/20738> (accessed 10th July 2015).

³¹² Source: Nasdaq website: <http://www.nasdaq.com/symbol/jpm/institutional-holdings?page=2> (accessed 19th July 2016).

In January 2016, while geologists are still finding it difficult to formally approve the start of a new geological epoch, an article in *Science* by 24 geologists concluded that changes in processes of sedimentation, where materials (plastics, biological material, pesticides, GHG, ash, radionuclides and metals) are mapped through geological strata, place the start of the Anthropocene as the mid 20th century.³¹³ Their argument is that changes to the earth's lithosphere as a result of accelerations in the burning of fossil fuel, industrial monoculture farms, plastic and other toxic waste and fallout from nuclear weapons testing (until 1980) are so extensive that we have entered a new geological epoch named as the Anthropocene (from arthropod – 'human' and cene 'new'), since the changes to the lithosphere are the result of human intervention. The term now represents a total view of the ecological disaster and a total picture of the human that is to blame. I argue here that the Anthropocene is a convenient ideological construct that deflects blame for the crisis away from the real culprits.

I do not propose to reproduce the arguments of Andreas Malm who lays the blame for the crisis at the doors of the capitalists who control what is dug up and where it is burned or transformed.³¹⁴ Rather, I propose to translate Malm's argument into a geological narrative of digging, dwelling, land generation, land re-constitution, construction and destruction that surrounds *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*.

The site for *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* was prepared with 285 truckloads of dirty landfill containing, "rubble, dirt, rusty pipes and other garbage. Tractors flattened the area and 80 more truckloads of dirt were dumped and spread to constitute the ten-inch minimum of topsoil needed for planting."³¹⁵ In 1982 Battery Park Landfill was a newly emerging area of land that was in the process of being reclaimed from the Hudson River estuary by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The process of filling the Hudson River with material in order to expand the land available for development in Lower Manhattan began generations before. In fact, the source of the material for Battery Park Landfill was two giant holes dug for the foundations and underground levels of The Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre. These holes were dug through material that was itself formed of landfill thrown into the Hudson River in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to expand the size of Lower Manhattan that was rapidly becoming an important and valuable

³¹³ Waters et al., 'The Anthropocene is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene', *Science*, 8th Jan 2016, vol. 351, Issue 6269. Abstract accessed on-line 3rd Jun 2016. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/351/6269/aad2622>

³¹⁴ Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, (London, New York: Verso 2016).

³¹⁵ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 164.

trading hub. So this earth had already been dug up and thrown into the water once and was dug up and thrown into the water again to form the land on which the field of wheat was sown. In total, material excavated from the foundations of The World Trade Centre extended 210 meters into the Hudson River and 452 meters in length.³¹⁶ Creating Battery Park Landfill from the excavated material of The Twin Towers was an expedient way of removing the material from the site since it reduces transportation costs and created valuable new land for development right next to The World Trade Center.

The digging up of earth from the building site of The World Trade Center and the creation of new land from the estuary constitute powerful geological forces as well as large-scale forces of construction, habitation and dwelling. *Wheatfield* builds further layers of material that will constitute geological strata in millennia to come. After the wheat had been harvested, a 'billion-dollar luxury complex' was built: Battery Park City.³¹⁷ The minerals, ores and fossil fuels used to build Battery Park City and The Twin Towers were themselves dug out of the ground, transformed into concrete, steel, plastic and glass, transported to Manhattan and re-constructed. The Twin Towers constitute the backdrop to Denes's wheat field. Their demise nineteen years later presents a further geological and economic narrative that I will return to in this section, but while Denes was digging furrows, thousands of office workers who dwelled in The Twin Towers could look out of their windows and see the artist at work.

Denes describes the labour of digging furrows for the seeds: "The planting consisted of digging 258 furrows by hand, clearing off rocks and garbage then placing the seed by hand and covering the furrows with soil. Each furrow took two to three hours."³¹⁸ (in total the furrows took 516 - 774 hours of labour or 65 - 97 eight-hour working days). Denes acknowledges the importance of human labour in the project: "... the risks we took and the hardships we endured were all part of the basic concept."³¹⁹ During the seeding workers nearby who were levelling the landfill for development treated Denes and her team as intruders.³²⁰ The threats and torments endured by Denes have to be imagined, as does the experience of the construction workers who might see themselves as heroic pioneers, forming and shaping valuable new land for Battery Park City. Denes, the pioneering artist,

³¹⁶ From 'Construction of The World Trade Centre' Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Construction_of_the_World_Trade_Center

³¹⁷ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 164.

³¹⁸ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 164 - 165.

³¹⁹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 162 - 164.

³²⁰ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 209.

digging for a few days with hand tools in the specially laid topsoil must have challenged the values associated with their lifelong labour. Digging by hand confronts mechanisation and perhaps underlines the colonisation of the workers' territory by an artist and her team. A field of wheat on the site of a US\$ 4.5 billion luxury development confronts the value of the land that the workers might spend a decade labouring through. According to Denes when the wheat started sprouting hostility waned and she writes: "the construction workers boasted about 'our wheat field' and no longer threatened us for trespassing".³²¹

The colonising of the land by an artist and her wheat field was mitigated by the workers' sense of re-appropriation of the land through which they spent so much of their working lives.³²² The workers initially accused the artist of trespassing and I was reminded of my confrontations with Kevin in Albion Millennium Green (chapter one), who accused me of appropriating public land for my own financial and professional benefit. For many years, Kevin had laboured in AMG for free, picking up litter and clearing dog excrement on a daily basis. Between us we negotiated our economic relationship with AMG and I have to admit, there were times when I felt like my performance experiments were trespassing on public land. After the show, Kevin spent hours clearing algae out of the pond and reported sightings of birds bathing in its waters. He was able to reassert control over the landscape that he dwelled in.

Wheatfield – A Confrontation negotiates the economics of land: who owns it and what is allowed to happen on and through it. It is clear to me that the workers who saw the field being dug were not 'just looking' but were experiencing powerful correspondence between their world and the world of the digging artist. They were translating the artwork into their own experience of labour and dwelling in the city. Other meanings and narratives associated with the artwork: its reflections on finance, capitalism, commerce and the conspicuous consumption of the market economy are suggested by the continuing emergence of the site long after the digging is done.

Much of the photographic documentation of *Wheatfield* foregrounds not the digging but the ripening field of wheat with The Twin Towers of The World Trade Centre dominating the skyline in the background.³²³ The thin stalks, grown every year on farms throughout the world and soon to be harvested seem to support, cradle, or hold up the seemingly indestructible edifices of human construction and trade that were also to be cut down and replaced like a new car or next years crop with the new One World Trade Center

³²¹ Ibid. p. 209.

³²² Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 162 – 164.

³²³ See Denes's own website (accessed 10/03/2015), <http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html>

Tower opening in 2012, for which another big hole was dug. The narratives emerging from the documentation of Denes's work offer multiple paradoxes. The simple serenity of a field of wheat, farming, countryside and food rubs up against frenzied commercial activity, construction, transport, violence and destruction.

In terms of human performance, *Wheatfield* offers a number of social narratives, dialogues and exchanges involving countless witnesses, participants, discussions, arguments, emotions and contracts. Tens of thousands of office workers could look out of their place of work and watch the preparation, digging, planting, growing and harvesting. Perhaps they simply glanced once at the field of wheat. Perhaps they saw the digging, noticed the changing colour of the field and experienced a correspondence with the work or a different kind of translation to that experienced by the construction workers.

As a performance, *Wheatfield* was particularly dramatic during harvest when reactions among onlookers, "ranged from astonishment to being moved to tears."³²⁴

All those Manhattanites who had been watching the field grow from green to golden amber and gotten attached to it – the stockbrokers, economists, office workers, tourists and others attracted by the media coverage – stood around in sad silence. Many cried. TV crews were everywhere, but they too spoke little and then in a hushed voice.³²⁵

The paragraph above appears under Denes's own sub-heading, 'The Act' and since theatre plays are traditionally divided into 'Acts', the reader is reminded of the performative nature of the event. Actions are often performed by Denes at specific times and places when she knows that people and cameras are liable to be watching. In the exhibition, *Radical Nature - Environmental Activism* (2009) at The Barbican, London, documentation of *Wheatfield* is displayed as nine colour photographs, the central one of which shows Denes standing alone and surrounded by the ripened wheat field.³²⁶ With evening light reflecting off the golden corn and the iconic urban backdrop of Lower Manhattan, Denes is looking, not at the camera or the wheat but away from Manhattan to the horizon. She holds a stick or staff vertically at arms length. We can't see the end of the stick that rests on the ground but might imagine a scythe, a spade, a hoe or a rake. She presents herself as a 'pioneer of ecological environmental art'. She looks to the future even if there is more than a hint of nostalgia for a forgotten agricultural past. She is not acting in the sense that she is not

³²⁴ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 164.

³²⁵ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 164-165.

³²⁶ See promotional video for Radical Nature Exhibition, Barbican Art Gallery London, (accessed 05/07/2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-u8r5XcC3E>

representing someone other than herself yet it could be argued that Denes plays with the role of the labouring philosopher/artist, marooned in their own vision of a new art.

In Denes's own description of the event there is the risk of exaggeration, sentimentality and idealisation. What seems clear is that *Wheatfield* speaks on many levels about what it means to dwell in the city, about geological transformation and about misplaced economic priorities and over consumption. The thin stems of wheat reaching up to the sky remind us of our own limited life span and of the fragility of our lives, our constructions, and our planet. The same paragraph quoted above, with a switch of object, might describe the aftermath of the collapse of The Twin Towers nineteen years later:

All those Manhattanites *who had lived and worked in the offices or shadows of the Twin Towers* and gotten attached to them – the stockbrokers, economists, office workers, tourists and others attracted by the media coverage – stood around in sad silence. Many cried. TV crews were everywhere, but they too spoke little and then in a hushed voice.

Growing wheat over this particular landfill site refers to the waste and detritus of human dwelling, and in financial terms, wastes some of the most valuable real estate in the world. Growing wheat beneath two symbols of free international trade refers to continuing poverty and hunger and the limitations of global capital when it comes to improving people's lives. In 1982, with Reagan installed as President of the United States and Thatcher the Prime Minister of the UK, the seeds of the globalized economy and multinational corporate power and accompanying ecological and geological devastation were being sown in the offices of The White House, Downing Street, Wall Street, The City of London and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre while Denes was sowing a field of wheat. Eighteen years later, with Reagan and Thatcher's free-market ideology enshrined in almost every corner of a globalized economy, the same minerals and ores that had been dug up and re-constituted into The Twin Towers returned to earth as the towers collapsed, engulfing Lower Manhattan in debris and a cloud of dust and ash.

The debris from the attack on September 11th 2001 took eight months to dig up and carry away. Metal was sent to China for re-cycling. Pulverised concrete, glass, plastic, paper and human remains were taken to an old landfill site that was reopened to receive the barge-loads of debris. The landfill site, with the sinister name of 'Fresh Kills', became the scene of a strange reverse-archaeological ritual. Masked FBI agents picked through the

material as it passed by on a conveyor belt on its way to landfill.³²⁷ They removed some of the human remains and personal possessions but considering the fragmentary nature of much of the debris it is certain that human remains were buried along with the paper, concrete, glass and plastics that had turned to dust. At the site of The Twin Towers the excavated holes were reformed as two huge recessed pools.

Most public art works and memorials to human activity, statues in particular, reach upwards towards the sky signalling growth, development, achievement, artifice and construction. A defining element of the rebuilding process at the site of The Twin Towers has been a memorial to the dead from the 2001 (and 1993) attacks. The design of the memorial by Michael Arad and Peter Walker is based on the concept “Reflecting Absence”.³²⁸ The design includes an approximately 3-acre landscaped plaza surrounding two pools of water recessed approximately thirty feet below ground level. Names of the victims were inscribed around each of the pools. The two square pools mark the footprint of the two towers. Water cascades down the walls of the pools, gathers at the bottom and then disappears through a square hole in the centre of the pool. The floor of the central hole is invisible so it appears the water is pouring into the body of the Earth. The memorial is not a pond as such because the water is in a constant state of movement but it is a sombre reminder of our own mortality and eventual return to the earth. Yet some of the victims of the disaster are *actually* buried in a vast pile of garbage at Fresh Kills.

Fresh Kills has been earmarked for development as a large urban park three times bigger than Central Park in Manhattan. The four huge mounds of garbage built up since 1946 produce vast amounts of methane that leaches out into the atmosphere so before the land can be dwelled upon the methane has to be managed. A network of collection pipes channel the methane into a purification plant from where it can be distributed for household use. 175,000 feet of pipe collects eight million cubic feet of gas daily, which is refined to produce 4 million cubic feet of pipeline quality methane: enough to heat 30,000 homes.³²⁹

Imagine *Rising Pink Clouds* installed on Fresh Kills Landfill. What if the millions of cubic feet of methane was not turned into profitable energy to heat homes or fire ovens

³²⁷ High Court Won't Hear Appeal From 9/11 Families, Associated Press Report, October 4th 2010, Accessed 10 June 2015:

http://www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2010/10/high_court_wont_hear_appeal_fr.html

³²⁸ 'Lower Manhattan Development Corporation World Trade Center Memorial and Cultural Program General Project Plan', June 2, 2004, As Amended February 14, 2007 accessed 10 February, 2015: Online: <http://www.renewnyc.com/content/pdfs/GPPandSitePlan.pdf>

³²⁹ See NYC Parks web site: Freshkills Park, Accessed 20 April, 2016: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/park-features/freshkills-park/about-the-site>

but was instead wasted in economic terms and fed into ponds containing algae that remove its damaging properties and release clouds of pink smoke over the highest geological formation on the East Coast of America? In Figure 3.2 I imagine the view of *Rising Pink Clouds* on Fresh Kills from the balcony of a luxury apartment built near the site of *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*. The labour of digging the ponds and the authorial voice of the artist is at a situated distanced but I wonder how the viewer, from a luxury apartment might translate the artwork into their own stories and experiences? Might those who dwell in Battery Park City be reminded of fragmented and buried human remains rotting down along with decades of accumulated garbage? Might they prefer it if the methane was productively used to heat their homes in winter or heat ovens to bake bread made from wheat that was grown from seed grown on Battery Park Landfill during a confrontation with The Twin Towers?³³⁰



Figure 3.2 (Left) *Rising Pink Clouds* Imagined from the balcony of a luxury apartment in Battery Park City. The Statue of Liberty is visible far left in green. Artwork graphics with thanks to Iris Borgers. (Original photo from letting agency website)

Wheatfield was re-staged in Milan between February and June 2015.³³¹ Its location and timing brought new meanings and affects. The twelve-acre site is in the centre of Milan between the two main railway stations of the city. The field is surrounded by high rise contemporary architectural forms, roads and railways and considering the undoubtedly high value of the land, it is surprising to learn that after *Wheatfield* the land is being turned

³³⁰ "The harvested grain traveled to twenty-eight cities around the world in an exhibition called 'The International Art Show for the End of World Hunger' ... (1987-90). The seeds were carried away by people who planted them in many parts of the globe." From Denes's website Accessed 3 April, 2015: <http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html>

³³¹ *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes*, Produced by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, at Porta Nova District, Milan, Accessed, 21 March, 2015: http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/Agnes+Denes_1.html

into a public park called '*Biblioteca degli Alberi*' or 'Library of Trees'.³³² Architecturally, compared with the site in New York, there is perhaps less of a sense of finance and commerce and, between the two rail stations, more of a sense of bodily movement and transport: departure and arrival. The field of wheat welcomed millions of visitors to the Milan Expo 2015 (opened 1st May 2015) asking them to consider, on their way to a celebration of culture and commerce, the distribution and transport of food and the ways we use and dwell on urban land.

The theme of the Expo was "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" and Denes's *Wheatfield* would appear to elegantly ask questions about feeding the world. Milan Expo 2015 is sponsored by many large corporations including food multinationals such as Coca Cola, McDonalds and Algida Ice Cream (owned by Unilever).³³³ These companies not only sell food in the globalized market and to visitors to the Expo, they are also keen to promote their brand and might not look kindly on any visitor attraction that questions their global and local control over the production, distribution and consumption of food. Heavily armed Police confronted a student protest when the Expo opened on 1st May. The students' overriding concern was large corporations' hold over the distribution and consumption of food. One protestor commented:

We have been protesting against the Expo 2015 since Milan first announced it would host the exhibition in 2008. ... The expo does not aim to resolve the problem of global hunger and does not address the question that many ask: Why do people not have access to food and water? The expo does not answer this question because the very same expo organisers – big corporations – are the reason why people cannot access food and water.³³⁴

The processes at play at the Milan *Wheatfield* vary considerably from the original, reflecting changes to the ways humans engage with the urban landscape. Seed planting in Milan began on 28th February when hundreds of people were given a pot of seeds and a stick to make a hole in the soil. Video documentation shows people of all ages poking holes in mud with the stick and dropping seeds into the hole.³³⁵ Seeding proper was completed mechanically on 5th March³³⁶ but the participation of hundreds of volunteers offers a

³³² Fondazione Nicola Trussardi Press Office, Press Kit, Downloaded 21st March 2015:

<http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/Exhibitions/Weathfield.html>

³³³ See official Expo 2015 Milano Website, Accessed 19th May 2015 <http://www.expo2015.org/en/sponsor>

³³⁴ Ludovica Iaccino, 'Expo Milano 2015: Hundreds of Students Protest Against Food Exposition', *International Business News*, published April 30th 2015. Accessed 20th May 2015:

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/expo-milano-2015-hundreds-students-protest-against-food-exposition-1499139>

³³⁵ See official Expo 2015 Milano video, Accessed 17th May, 2015 <https://vimeo.com/122451415>

³³⁶ See official Expo 2015 Milano video (accessed 21/05/2015) <https://vimeo.com/122643554>

further layer of social narrative to the project. A community of planters is established who will be able to witness the growth and harvest of the wheat. For those who planted seeds, the trees that come after *Wheatfield* will tell a story of digging holes in the earth and staggering through a muddy field on a chilly February day. The performance of digging in Milan is a fun social activity rather than the hard labour endured by Denes and her cohorts during the New York project. This signals two interesting and contrasting contextual developments of the work.

On the one hand, the intervening 33 years have seen an explosion in the development of community gardens in urban areas. In the next chapter, I examine how these gardens, parks, urban farms, verges and greens have encouraged participation in the management, upkeep and development of urban green spaces and a growing enthusiasm for digging, planting, and ecological architecture and art on public land. I argue that Denes helped lay the foundations for this growth in public engagement with urban landscapes, since the planning of her unique events would involve town planners, administrators, architects and other institutional bodies who might re-think the value of ecological art. A wide pathway moved through the field in Milan providing a stage for the leisurely dwelling of members of the public reflecting the participatory and inclusive aims of project. On the other hand, the agricultural processes that actually feed the world have become, in those 33 years, increasingly dominated by monoculture, fossil fuelled mechanisation, chemical saturation, corporate control of what seeds are planted in furrows and, for example, the application of dangerous cocktails of herbicides to replace the manual practice of digging up weeds by hand. It is noteworthy that the Milan wheat field was not sprayed with herbicides because it was considered too dangerous to spray in a populated area.³³⁷ As a result the crop was infested with weeds and there is an acknowledgement of the harm these chemicals can do. Yet there was no acknowledgement of the possible harm to populations who work in or dwell near the farms that spray herbicides year after year, or the potential harm to the wider community from eating food that is contaminated with dangerous levels of Glyphosate based herbicides.³³⁸

³³⁷ Abi Morris, 'Urban Harvest: Agnes Denes Plants a Wheatfield in the Heart of Milan', *Wallpaper*, 10th July, 2015, Accessed on-line 10th June 2016, <http://www.wallpaper.com/art/urban-harvest-agnes-denes-plants-a-wheatfield-in-the-heart-of-milan>

³³⁸ There is not time in this thesis to examine Glyphosate, the most extensively used herbicide. During the Spring of 2016, the European Parliament in Brussels was locked into a contentious debate concerning the re-licensing of the product, with Italy, France, Belgium and the Netherlands all opposing permission, and Germany remaining neutral. The vote has become a focus for disagreement between corporate and environmental lobbying groups. See: Arthur Nelson, 'UN/WHO Panel in Conflict of Interest Row Over Glyphosate Risk', *The Guardian* on-line 17th May, 2016, (Downloaded 26/05/2016):

During harvest in Milan, there was a gesture to harvesting by hand.³³⁹ *Wallpaper* magazine displays pictures of attractive people clutching bouquets of wheat they have cut from the field as well as the shiny new green combine harvester doing its job. If there was more than a hint of nostalgia for a forgotten agricultural past in the documentation of the wheat field in Manhattan, the nostalgia was positively oozing from the suntanned straw-hatted Milanese who cut wheat by hand. Harvest was presented in the frame of a rural idyll in the heart of the city: an idealised agricultural past that nevertheless was rubbing up against an idealised future of shiny bright mechanisation. In Manhattan Denes was confronting the forces represented by The Twin Towers yet the giant office block that dominated the site in Milan seemed to be looking down over events with a certain arrogant paternalism. The name of a bank 'UniCredit' loomed from the top of the tower of offices and as the only visible text in the surrounding skyline it reminds us who is really in charge of our agriculture.

The title of the New York project was *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*. It challenged the financial institutions that surround it calling them to account and demanding new ways of communicating, trading and dwelling with others on the planet. It was as Denes writes: "... an intrusion into the Citadel, a confrontation of High Civilization."³⁴⁰ There is a confrontation with the construction workers nearby and with capitalism in the use of the most valuable real estate in the world for a simple field of wheat. Yet Denes argues "it was also Shangri-La, a small paradise, one's childhood, a hot summer afternoon in the country, peace, forgotten values, and simple pleasures".³⁴¹ In Milan, the title of the project has been changed to *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes*. The emphasis is on a collective pastoral utopia that blends a nostalgic reverence for a forgotten chemical-free agriculture with a look forward to an increasingly automated agricultural future.

It could be argued that the powerful paradoxes at play in Denes's work between the individual artist's vision and site-specific modes of dwelling are diffused by collaboration with hundreds of seed planters, as well as the architects, developers and

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/may/17/unwho-panel-in-conflict-of-interest-row-over-glyphosates-cancer-risk>

Also see Sustainable Pulse, 'German Beer Industry in Shock Over Probable Carcinogen Glyphosate Contamination' February 25, 2016, (Downloaded 20/05/2016.):

<http://sustainablepulse.com/2016/02/25/german-beer-industry-in-shock-over-probable-carcinogen-glyphosate-contamination/#.V0gzE20Tnz>

³³⁹ Morris, 'Urban Harvest'.

³⁴⁰ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 209.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

corporations who must approve the work. Somewhere in the chain of power that selected, produced and designed the Milan *Wheatfield*, the word 'confrontation' was discarded and replaced with the artist's name. The authorial voice of Denes is thus reinforced and despite the mass participation in the performance of digging, narratives concerning the failures of the current economic system to feed and provide a safe dwelling place for all are exiled outside the walls of Expo 2015.

In Milan, *Wheatfield* and The Library of Trees Park is part of a regeneration project for the area of the city between the two main stations. It is a positive reflection of the power of Denes's work that it interweaves with institutionalised ecologically sensitive urban development and becomes a source of pride among the inhabitants of the city. I am not opposed to people having fun and performing creative collective ecological actions. On the contrary, I am consistently and pleasantly surprised by the willingness of people to get stuck in and get their hands dirty. Their desire is a source of optimism. But if her work gives the impression that there is no need for further confrontation with the economies of trade, development, land and commerce, then the affective power of Denes's work is perhaps compromised.

For Denes the act of digging through the earth is often a vital ingredient of her work. It is a primary method of activating both time and space. It is never the final act of construction but is often a part of the work's genesis. What sets Denes apart from the artists described so far in this thesis is her commitment to the creative exploration of scientific processes that might ameliorate some of the most destructive human forces. Digging therefore becomes a means of preparing the ground for ecological experiments that take the form of artworks that can extend through a city. The labour of digging and the human hand remain present in her work and so does the human that digs metaphorically deep for an art that can help a degraded planet heal itself.

Part B - Reflection on Personal Practice

Digging in The Academy: The Performance of Digging as the Generation of Knowledge

In this section I ask how the performance of digging can be experienced in the context of knowledge generation in the academic institution. My practical experiments analysed so far have occurred in the context of the regulatory, social and economic structures of a public green space in London and the garden of a theatre in Reims. Adapting my practice to correspond with the frameworks of the city-centre university presents a host of challenges but these challenges have, together with the case studies, opened up new ways of experimenting and thinking about performance.

When Denes declares, “Digging deep is what art is all about”³⁴² she is invoking a metaphor of the artist as critical researcher: exploring, experimenting and probing. Denes’s creative practice has illuminated the ways that ecological processes can be revealed and understood by the action of digging through earth or landfill. The large scales of her works can also involve the participation and spectatorship of thousands of people but in their scale and ambition the ecological and economic narratives she seeks to negotiate can sometimes be diffused. Kaprow’s interest in the microeconomics of art production led him towards smaller events that revealed and negotiated a way of dwelling outside the capitalised art market through conversations and intermittent activity. There are economic advantages and financial rewards for artists that are able to scale up their work with the support of large institutions. TLT returned to the theatre building after Pittsburgh because

³⁴² Denes, *The Human Argument*, p.164.

they were able to earn a living within the frame of the (European) theatre establishment but Kaprow's practice emerged from the academy and he was able to maintain small-scale, quieter, informal events and research activities like *Trading Dirt* (along with his teaching) through his employment in the university.

Every artist needs to be able to feed, house and clothe themselves and during periods of unemployment in the precarious economy of the UK's theatre sector I have gained employment as a teacher and other times I have picked up a spade and started digging for a wage with gardening and landscaping jobs. During hours of digging holes for fence posts or trenches for walls or excavating ground for driveways or paths, the idea took root that the work was transforming me; building knowledge and developing my skills and capabilities to flourish in the other worlds I dwelled in. Somehow, digging holes was helping me to become a 'better' teacher and a 'better' performer. I have only understood the processes of digging in terms of knowledge generation since undertaking this research and my return to the academy was, at least in part, motivated by a desire to understand if, how and why my labour was changing me and also to understand how and why the performance of digging might transform others for as Ingold declares; "What value lies in transformations of the self if they end there, if selves do not go on to transform others and the world?"³⁴³ My performance practice and my research involve both a transformation of the self and a translation of my words and actions into the worlds of many others. They are entwined together in the university and in what Ingold describes as the 'meshwork'.³⁴⁴

The artists I describe in this thesis are interested in transformations of the landscape, the self, the communities of spectator and performer and ways of dwelling. None of them aim only to document the world as it is but they propose ways that it *might* be. They are asking questions about the contemporary economic and/or ecological landscape with propositions that are enacted; what if we swap some dirt? What if we grow a field of wheat in Manhattan? What if we throw off our metaphorical chains and dig the earth to grow vegetables? What if we dig a pond or plant a tree? What might be learned? What transformations, correspondences or knowledge might be generated? The performers analysed here are both researchers and artists who learn by digging, though not with some definite end point in mind or final conclusion to their practice but in a continual process of becoming that in the case of *Tree Mountain* at least, continues long after the

³⁴³ Ingold, *Making*, p. 13.

³⁴⁴ Ingold, *Making*, pp. 132 – 136.

death of the artist. The conclusion to this thesis will draw together my thinking and practice but it will also form a foundation for future research experiments and performances.

Ingold argues that we can gain knowledge about our ways of dwelling by carrying out tasks: whether directed towards cultural activity or the pragmatic needs of eating, clothing and shelter. He describes tasks such as kite flying, making a clay pot and basket weaving to argue that the process of making or animating materials and objects is not so much an interaction between separate, networked entities but a 'correspondence' or dance involving the person, objects and materials.

When it comes to digging earth then, we can see that the digger must respond to the type of tool being used: spade, mattock or hoe and adjust her gestures and movements accordingly. The tool responds to the movement of the person who digs and the texture of the earth. The earth, too, responds to the gestures of the digger and the form and movement of the tool. Since the digger can never be certain what lies beneath the surface, she must also respond according to the consistency, moisture content and grain of what she is digging into (Figure 3.3).

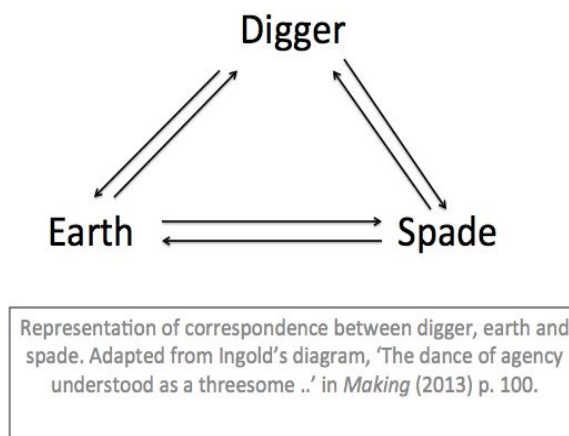


Figure 3.3

In the correspondence between tool, material and person argues Ingold, knowledge is revealed about the earth, about the process of digging and about the digger. During my time in the academy as researcher and teacher, through planning, guiding, participating in and observing the activity of digging my aim has been to develop my own capacities of

judgement and my own skills of perception with students and scholars in the course of what Ingold calls, “direct, practical and sensuous engagements with our surroundings.”³⁴⁵

Making, then, is a process of correspondence: not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming.³⁴⁶

Bringing forth the potentials of digging in the context of performance practice might summarise this research project’s aims. I wish to examine now my first attempt to bring the practice of digging into Birkbeck to ask how digging might reveal new insights, new experiences and new knowledge in the context of The School of Arts.

A Pond for Birkbeck

There is an obvious problem with bringing the practice of digging into the university building or the theatre building or indeed any building. The problem is that it is difficult to dig through concrete or wooden floorboards and even if it is physically possible, without permissions that are unlikely to be granted, such activity would ultimately lead to cancelled classes, arrest for criminal damage and banishment. On the other hand, my reason for returning to the academy to undertake this research was not to find a place to construct more ponds or plant more trees, but to understand and theorise my practice and the experiences that digging generates and suggest further routes of exploration through critical analysis of my practice and the practice and theory of other artists and scholars.

The work of dwelling in the academy involves reading, writing, listening, speaking and thinking and it involves correspondence with, and entanglement in, the work of other students, administrators, caterers, receptionists, accountants, security guards, librarians and scholars. I ask in this section how life in the university can involve making, digging and doing and how I have learned to develop my practice to correspond with the sensibilities of the university.

My research commenced with no intention of digging a pond at Birkbeck. The more I dwelled in the building, however, the more stories and narratives emerged concerning digging and dwelling and the more places I noticed where a pond could feasibly be installed. In particular, in a courtyard to the rear of number 47 Gordon Square where the eminent economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) who lived in Gordon Square from

³⁴⁵ Ingold, *Making*, p. 5.

³⁴⁶ Ingold, *Making*, p. 31.

1916 until his death, had his library. The site is visible from the room in the School now known as The Keynes Library that has been tastefully and sympathetically re-designed as a place for seminars, conferences, lectures and discussion. I ask how digging the pond might speak to Keynesian economic theory and illuminate the ways that land in central London is regulated and controlled.

The Keynesian narrative of digging I examine below is an opportunity to explore the economics of art production and dwelling in the city as well as situating my practice within the experiences and histories of the School of Arts. Keynes's influence on the economic strategies of many of the world's governments in the 20th and 21st centuries has been profound. He laid a theoretical foundation, based on *practical experience*, for the strategy of government investment in public services during times of economic recession that contrasts with the free-market economic strategy of 'austerity' and reductions in public spending that have been the guiding principles of the UK government since Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. In terms of the focus of this thesis I wish now to examine how Keynes negotiated the labour of digging as resistance to the economies of capitalism. My aim is to show how the economically un-productive labour of constructing an icehouse (Kaprow), digging ponds in landfill (Denes), or digging holes for ponds that benefit only frogs and newts (*Man Digs Pond*) might also offer resistance to the economic strategy that foregrounds 'production' at the expense of well-being and promotes profit at the expense of knowledge, capacity and the capability for all to flourish.

This examination of Keynes, dwelling and the performance of digging is centred on a paragraph (presumably composed in his library) first published in 1936 in *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*.³⁴⁷ Keynes provides an example of publicly funded work that engages with wasted labour and digging and aims to stimulate consumption and growth in the economy. In its ironic reflection on the geological scars of capitalism, Keynes is also critiquing government programmes that reserve public spending for the support of the military and mining.³⁴⁸

If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths in disused coalmines which are then filled up to the surface with town rubbish, and leave it to private enterprise on well-tried principles of *laissez-faire* to dig the notes up again (the right to do so being obtained, of course, by tendering for leases of the

³⁴⁷ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*, (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1949, [1936]).

³⁴⁸ Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment*, p.130.

note-bearing territory), there need be no more unemployment and, with the help of the repercussions, the real income of the community, and its capital wealth also, would probably become a good deal greater than it actually is. It would indeed, be more sensible to build houses and the like; but if there are political and practical difficulties in the way of this, the above would be better than nothing.³⁴⁹

In Keynes's example the holes have already been dug by miners for the extraction of fossilised carbon but in the brutal embrace of the geological scars of industrialised urban dwelling Keynes's example of the ways a depressed economy can be kick-started into growth by government intervention; toxic abandoned mines and digging for money through underground tunnels of garbage is an ironic reflection on the economic strategy that promotes state investment in the military and mining. There is even a sideswipe at the private companies who would bid for the digging work since his was a lifelong campaign against *laissez faire* and giving the power of capital free reign to do what it will.

Keynes goes on to attack the 'prudent financiers' who worry about adding to the financial burden of future generations by building them houses to live in. He was writing in the 1930s but Keynes might be attacking the current UK Conservative government's withdrawal of investment in public services, its insistence on reducing government debt and especially its social housing policy, initiated by Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s and still in operation, which obliges councils to sell at a discount their housing stock to tenants who wanted to buy them, while not allowing the revenues from the sales to be ploughed back into public housing.

Keynes was writing in the 1930s when the economies of the UK and US were in contraction and his emphasis was on growing the economy. Today, growth for its own sake is still regarded as the aim of economic strategies. If Keynes was alive today, he would surely have resisted the kind of growth that benefits few and poisons the ecologies of all, but his attack on a policy of public subsidies for private mining companies and the military at the expense of social housing and welfare might equally be an attack on the financial priorities of the crisis-ridden contemporary globalised economy. He declares that, in the "real world" up to the time of writing in 1936:

Just as wars have been the only form of large-scale loan expenditure which statesman have thought justifiable, so gold-mining is the only pretext for digging

³⁴⁹ Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment*, p.129. *Laissez-faire* is a French phrase originating in the seventeenth century meaning 'let it be'. It was adopted by classical economists, such as Adam Smith in the UK, who advocated the removal of government regulation and other restrictions to the pursuit of profit. Their argument, and the argument of the current UK Conservative government, rests on the principle that the accumulation of wealth by the merchant class will benefit everyone.

holes in the ground which has recommended itself to bankers as sound finance; and each of these activities has played its part in progress – failing something better.³⁵⁰

In the contemporary economic discourse we might add the digging of holes for the mining of oil, coal and natural gas, the accompanying automobile industry and the mechanisation of agriculture to the list of activities that banks *and* governments have been willing to finance in the name of progress, economic growth and profit. But the phrase, “failing something better” lets us know that Keynes is being ironic when he gives war and mining their parts in ‘progress’.

His argument is even more persuasive today when war, mass migration and the collapse of our ecologies have brought home the failures of free trade and capitalism to bring peace and prosperity to all. If Keynes was alive today he would not, I feel sure, approve of the US\$18 billion (£12 billion) invested in the fossil fuel industry by the UK government in 2013 and 2014: an industry that is rewarding its executives with huge pay awards, choking our planet and threatening the welfare of all.³⁵¹

Keynes was an avid art collector and in January 1941 he became a Trustee of the National Gallery. A month later he was offered the chair of the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, a government body that transformed into The Arts Council of Great Britain under Keynes’s guidance at the end of the Second World War.³⁵² During the war music, theatre and visual art was taken into air-raid shelters, hospitals, workshops and mining areas.³⁵³ Keynes believed that only the best quality work should be presented and he blocked financial support for amateur choirs.³⁵⁴ This is perhaps a surprising rejection of a popular form of participatory creative practice but his contention was that the ‘best’ art could instruct, inspire and be appreciated by all.

One of his strongest overt emotional reactions to a work of art, as Richard Davenport-Hines reveals, was at the Royal Opera House in 1946 during Keynes’s last public appearance. He helped to save the Covent Garden theatre from demolition and was moved to tears when he heard that ushers at the theatre gave up their clothing rations to provide fabric for the shades of the auditorium lights for a Royal Gala performance of *The Sleeping*

³⁵⁰ Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment*, p. 130.

³⁵¹ Elizabeth Bast et al. *Empty Promises, G20 Subsidies to Oil, Gas and Coal Production*, (Washington DC: Overseas Development International, London & Oil Change International, 2015), p. 12.

³⁵² Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man*, pp. 297 – 298.

³⁵³ Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man*, p. 299.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

Beauty.³⁵⁵ One might conjecture that the royal family were rich enough to provide the fabric themselves but this correspondence between high art and the everyday workers of the theatre had a deep impact on Keynes.

I imagined Keynes standing on the balcony at the rear of his library and looking down to the ground at the small courtyard at the back of number 46 Gordon Square. Today, a toilet and washroom has been extended into the courtyard that is partially overgrown with lush looking vegetation including nettles and a fig tree. I considered constructing a small pond in the courtyard and arranged to have a closer look. Access to the courtyard is through an alarmed locked door in the basement of the School of Arts and I needed a member of staff to access the key from the security staff and to get the alarm turned off. It is clear that the courtyard is rarely visited by people and is accessed only for building works such as the toilet extension. In the courtyard original stone flagstones formed the main floor area, with a bed of earth about a meter wide and three meters long at the rear edge. I slipped, spilled my coffee over my jacket and nearly fell on the slippery flagstones. Dr Sophie Hope, the member of staff who accompanied me laughed with me over my clumsiness. It was not an auspicious start to the pond project and I considered the health and safety of any audience members who might be standing on the slippery flagstones watching me dig a pond.

The earth at the far end of the courtyard has been colonised by a variety of plants including nettles and brambles and a fig tree overhangs from the neighbouring garden. There was also some debris left over from the toilet construction. I imagined a small pond in a bare patch of earth near the nettles and brambles and just visible from the Keynes Library, (Figure 3.4).

Discussion of the proposed pond with my supervisors, administrators and theatre studies staff at the School of Arts was met with general enthusiasm. Several staff members offered to accompany the dig with song and/or acoustic music. The building manager at the school was also very supportive and suggested I ask permission from the legal services team at London University. The legal services team suggested I ask permission from the Estates Department at Birkbeck and at this point I made the error of confusing the legal department of London University with the Estates Department of London University and the wording of my email to the Estates Department at Birkbeck caused some confusion. I also made the mistake of including, in my request for permission, links to the videos of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims and London. With hindsight, these videos did not represent the kind of

³⁵⁵ Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man*, p. 303.

performance I was beginning to imagine in the courtyard at Birkbeck. It was becoming clear that the pond would be much smaller and that the dig would be an opportunity for a careful, slow and delicate exploration of a bit of ground that may have been left undisturbed for many decades.



Figure 3.4 (Left)
View from the
Keynes Library
with pond
projection
looking down at
the small
courtyard to the
rear of 47
Gordon Square.
Photo: Author.

How might the pond dig be able to resonate with Keynes and with the economies of dwelling in the academy? To answer this question I turned to the exchange of earth enacted by Kaprow in *Trading Dirt*. I proposed a Kaprowian exchange between the site of the dig and a site chosen by visitors. The trade would be on a smaller scale than Kaprow's experiment in *Trading Dirt*; perhaps trading a small bag of what Kaprow might call 'heavy duty academic dirt'. I assumed that most of the visitors to the dig would be from the everyday workplace of the academy. Depending on their role (cleaners, scholars, students, administrators, caterers, security guards etc.), the earth taken home would have different associations. In the process of claiming their *own* bag of earth from their workplace and travelling home on the train or the bus, they might all feel a sense of *ownership* of a tiny bit of that place. They would also be leaving earth on the site so a bit of their place of dwelling would be left behind, like a footprint; perhaps forgotten, perhaps living in the memory long after the visitor has retired or moved to another workplace.

As a way of negotiating and extending the daily rhythms of working in the academy I proposed a 24-hour, non-stop dwelling outside in the little courtyard (with perhaps the opportunity to use the toilet that extended into the site). Visitors could witness proceedings from the courtyard itself or from the balcony of the Keynes Library. The

different viewpoints would impact on the experience and reception of the dig. Down at ground level there is a strong sense of enclosure with high walls surrounding the site. Looking down from above induces a slight vertiginous tension, like looking down into a large hole. My initial approach to the Estates Department at Birkbeck was met with an understandable list of concerns:

I would like to see a copy of the permission from the University of London. You would need to submit a detailed risk assessment and method statement. The earth that is excavated would need to be distributed within the garden area and not removed from site. No earth must not [*sic*] be taken through the building. The route from the entrance of the building to the garden area will need to be checked prior to and after the event for damage. You will need to be prepared to pay of [*sic*] any damage to the building both externally or internally. No power tools will be allowed on site. No external lighting will be allowed unless checked and passed fit for use by the Estates Maintenance team. Noise will have to be kept to a minimum. The building closes at 21:30 each day and is cleared. Once the building has been cleared the Alarms are set. So whatever time this event starts everyone must vacate by 21:30. Please understand that I'm not trying to stop this proposed event.³⁵⁶

It was clear that obtaining permissions for *Man Digs Pond* at Birkbeck would be a difficult process and far more convoluted than in London or Reims. The tone of the email suggested that the writer felt undermined by my proposal and that I had underestimated his authority and specific knowledge of the site. I would have to be sensitive to the layers of bureaucracy that control what happens in this small, quiet, enclosed little corner of London. The building and grounds are now owned by the University of London and leased to Birkbeck. Birkbeck College is the legal owner. Who really controls what can and cannot happen there? I would have preferred the kind of face-to-face meetings I had when planning previous iterations of *Man Digs Pond*. Without being able to read the body language of those I was negotiating with, it was hard to understand the ways they experienced their work place and difficult to empathise with their sense of place.

I immediately responded to the list of conditions with a promise to abide by all requirements and promised a more controlled, slow excavation, in the manner of an archaeological dig. Though prompted by the more restrictive regulatory framework of Birkbeck, the exciting potential of a slower, careful dig began to emerge. What might the constituency of the earth tell us about the way the land has been used, divided, parcelled and passed from owner to owner? What knowledge might be revealed about the ways

³⁵⁶ Email received from Birkbeck Estates, 14th November, 2014.

humans have dwelled on the site? What potentials might be revealed about how we might dwell on the site in the future? What objects might Keynes have thrown out of his library window, down into the courtyard? After two weeks of negotiation, my desire for a pond at Birkbeck was denied:

I have looked into the buried services within the garden area which include heating services as well as drainage and soil waste. Some of the routes the services take are unconfirmed. So after careful consideration I am declining permission for this proposed event to go ahead.³⁵⁷

I had failed to translate my desire for a pond dig into the geological and regulatory framework of the university but became even more intrigued by what lay beneath the surface. As the courtyard's secrets were buried deeper, the more I wanted to know about 'unconfirmed' movements of waste and lines of soil pipes, drainage and heating services. When were they buried? Who buried them and what tools did they use? Where does our waste go after we excrete it into clean water and flush it away? Could the methane be tapped, fed through an algae-filled pond and transformed into pink clouds that drift over academic buildings? (Figure 3.5).

The response from the Estates team at Birkbeck was disappointing but perhaps understandable. I was determined to persevere with a dig in the courtyard at the School of Arts but I would need to change my approach and try and understand the sensibilities of those who control who can dig on the site and for what purpose. In the next chapter I explain how and why I intend to dig in the courtyard and offer visitors the opportunity to dig that earth during the final assessed practical experiment of this research project.

I was able to show, share, disseminate and critique my practical experiments through critical discussions, seminars and symposia at the School of Arts but it is only in the last year of my research that I have been able to develop my practice to correspond with the regulatory framework of the academy and bring digging into the school. In the following chapter I will describe how my practice has developed within the academy and analyse the questions I aim to answer through the planning, emergence and performance of the assessed performance.

The hardship endured by Denes and her team as they dug through landfill in Manhattan, the difficulty of digging for 24 hours during *Man Digs Pond*, the gift of earth to the audience from Beck during *Turning The Earth* are all forms of sacrifice. They involve the

³⁵⁷ Email received from Birkbeck Estates, 27 November, 2014.

loss of what might have been achieved if the time, land or earth had been put to more economically productive use. Keynes saw the economic benefits of paying people public money to create works of art in terms of increased production and redistribution of wealth. Digging by hand in the context of creative practice and the generation of knowledge can offer a model of a world that values our well-being above production.

Conclusion

This chapter has negotiated a central paradox that can be traced throughout this thesis: on the one hand, the artists considered here use the performance of digging to highlight and challenge the economic systems that determine who can dwell on land and who can dig it but on the other hand the artists are colonising land themselves and applying their own rules to places of dwelling. If there were frictions, tensions, narratives and dramas generated by this paradox in the work of Kaprow, TLT and my own practice, for Denes the large scales of her work in terms of space and time have the potential to generate commensurately large affects. The evidence I have offered in this chapter suggests that the scaling up of participatory practices does not always produce the social, economic and ecological affects that the artist might hope for.

Denes's work is full of paradoxes: the fragile stalks of wheat and the powerful financial institutions represented by The Twin Towers; the human and the other than human; ambition to change the world and humility in the face of the earth's own processes of repair. In the end, Denes's mission is a social one in that she wants to build "pride and self esteem, inspiring young minds ...".³⁵⁸ Her concern is with the ways we dwell through the landscape and her work engages with the ecological processes that define our places of dwelling. With *Rising Pink Clouds* she draws ecological narratives of care and repair that can reach across the population of a city and translate into heterogeneous stories and experiences of the people who dwell there.

In Manhattan during *Wheatfield, a Confrontation* Denes was clear that "... the risks we took and the hardships we endured were all part of the basic concept."³⁵⁹ I think that the same thing might be said of my own performance experiment, *Man Digs Pond*. Yet in Milan, *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes* nestles comfortably within an urban development programme and the multi-national corporate sponsors of Milan Expo 2015 and planting the seeds on sanitised if muddy land becomes a fun social event or a day's work for a tractor driver. If risk and hardship were a basic part of the concept their absence in Milan suggests its emergence as something contextually and conceptually different to the original.

The social nature of Kaprow's events, of my own practice and of the work of TLT has been scaled up in this chapter by examining the participation and spectatorship of thousands of people in *Tree Mountain*, *Wheatfield* and *Rising Pink Clouds*. The chapter has

³⁵⁸ Denes, *The Human Argument*, p. 216.

³⁵⁹ Denes, *The Human Argument*, pp. 162 – 164.

engaged with the complexities of participation, proximity and the blurring of distance between actor and watcher. The evidence I present here supports my argument that participatory practices that attempt to break down barriers between audience and performer can sometimes *highlight* hierarchies and inequitable distributions of agency, knowledge and capacity. Situated distance on the other hand gives the seer an opportunity and a freedom to translate the experience of digging into their own world.

In this chapter I have negotiated some of the forces that have led geologists, ecologists, earth scientists, anthropologists and journalists to describe the current era as the Anthropocene and the forces leading to climate change as ‘anthropogenic’. Anthropologist at the London School of Economics, Dr Jason Hickel, in a recent press article blamed fossil fuels on “70% of all *anthropogenic* greenhouse gas emissions”³⁶⁰ (the rest coming from agricultural practices and deforestation). In Manhattan Island during *Wheatfield a Confrontation*, with *Rising Pink Clouds* and during the Deepwater Horizon disaster, the geological forces of capital in terms of construction, landfill and mining are made apparent.

Normally the city’s geologies and the shifting flows of water, gas, waste and electricity are hidden beneath concrete and tarmac. When we dig, geologies are exposed but when the digging is to plant trees or dig a pond or for creative activity it can be a process of speculation about alternative economic models in which social transactions are foregrounded. For Jason Hickel and a growing body of economists, the solution to the ecological problem can only be found in a rethinking of our economic lives: “It’s time to pour our creative power into imagining a new global economy – one that maximises human wellbeing while actively shrinking our ecological footprint.”³⁶¹ It means a turn away from fossil fuel powered growth towards a sustainable or ‘steady state’ economy. Growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still the measure of success for the world’s industrialised economies but there is “robust evidence that it doesn’t make us happier, it doesn’t reduce poverty, and its ‘externalities’ produce all sorts of social ills: debt, overwork, inequality, and climate change.”³⁶² Proponents of the Anthropocene lay the blame for our geological transformation on a rising population’s natural propensity to mine and burn fossil fuels. I prefer to lay the blame on the economic powers that lay claim to our geologies and profit by their extraction and transformation.

³⁶⁰ Jason Hickel, “Clean Energy Won’t Save Us, Only a New Economic System Can” *The Guardian on-line*, 15th July 2016, accessed 20th July 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jul/15/clean-energy-wont-save-us-economic-system-can>

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

Keynes's impact on the way we dwell in terms of the economic life of the UK and much of the world has been profound. For thirty years after the Second World War his ideas were embraced by policy makers in North America and Western Europe. Between the 1980s and 2008 he fell out of favour as Thatcherism and Reaganomics dominated the economic landscape with the free market ideology of neoliberalism. Two key economic organisations Keynes was instrumental in founding: The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (IMF) have, since the 1980s, rejected Keynesianism in favour of the neoliberal agenda of privatisation of public services, free movement of capital, unregulated markets and low taxation. Yet, since the financial crisis of 2008, Keynes has been rehabilitated by many of the world's economic policy makers. Even the IMF has finally admitted, (eight years into the crisis), that neoliberalism has been 'oversold' as an ideology to guide economic policy.³⁶³ Today the IMF is calling for Keynesian-style investments in infrastructure.³⁶⁴ Unfortunately, like Keynes eighty years ago, their priority is to stimulate growth in GDP not the re-thinking of the economic model of globalized capital that has caused the crisis. Yet the IMF has also picked up Keynes's resistance to mining as a priority for public investment.

Taking the 'true costs' to health and the environment into account, the IMF admitted in 2016 that, worldwide, public funds were supporting the highly profitable fossil fuel industry to the tune of US\$5.3 trillion (£3.6 trillion) and that the subsidies promoted inequity and overwhelmingly benefited the rich at the expense of the poor.³⁶⁵ The savings generated from the end of subsidies to the fossil fuels industry would allow trillions of dollars to be diverted to health, welfare, clean energy and environmental and education programmes that benefit a far wider population. Paying people to create ponds, to share knowledge, to grow food or plant trees might not produce any material increase in GDP but in terms of generating wellbeing, knowledge and capacities to flourish, they might all play a part in an alternative economic system with priorities that go beyond the generation of profit.

³⁶³ Jonathan D. Ostry et al., 'Neoliberalism: Oversold', *Finance and Development*, Vol. 53, No.2, (IMF, June 2016), Downloaded 4th June, 2016. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/06/ostry.htm>

³⁶⁴ see: Reuters press release: 'IMF Calls for More Public Spending as Rate Cuts Lose Their Impact'. *Guardian on-line*, 23rd July 2016, Accessed 23rd July 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jul/23/imf-calls-for-more-government-spending-as-rate-cuts-lose-their-impact>

³⁶⁵ David Coady et al., *How Large are Global Energy Subsidies?* IMF Working Paper, WP/15/105. (IMF, May 2015), Downloaded 4th June, 2016. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2015/wp15105.pdf> p. 4.

Chapter Four

Assessed Presentation – The Performance of Digging and Dwelling as Research

Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the choices made and the questions asked in the formation of the assessed performance, to be presented as a part of the *viva voce* examination. Like the other performances of digging described in this thesis, I examine the final presentation of practice in terms of the place of performance, the communities of spectator and performer, the labour of digging and the durations of the presentation. I ask how the performance of digging is able to speak about the ecological processes and economic ‘rules of the house’ that define the ways we dwell in London and specifically within the context of the School of Arts at Birkbeck. I ask how the three case studies; TLT, Kaprow and Denes have informed my practice and helped me develop the presentation. The chapter plots my attempts to translate the labour of digging into the context of the university and the community that dwells there and explains the methods, questions asked and rationale of the final practical experiment of this research project.

Before describing the form and development of the presentation, I wish to reflect on the parameters within which it operates in terms of the examination of practice. In the context of the *viva voce* examination the examiners represent an essential part of the community through which the performance moves and a central aim of the presentation is to answer the question that every practice based research project must answer: how can PaR be made visible to the examiner? To answer this question I refer to a discussion during a symposium on 29th January 2016 at Birkbeck entitled *Practice Inside Research*. The one-day symposium in the Peltz Gallery at the School of Arts involved research students and scholars from three universities (Birkbeck, Sheffield Hallam and Middlesex). It was an opportunity to critically reflect on the ways that practice can play a part in the research process and specifically to ask how PaR might be presented to examiners. My practical contribution to the symposium is examined below in terms of how it helped me formulate the final presentation. Here I focus on an illuminating discussion that occurred during the feedback session at the Peltz regarding the role of practice in the submission of research for examination.

One contributor argued that the purpose of evidencing practice was not to ‘illustrate’ the findings of the research project but rather to evidence the processes of

practical experimentation in terms of its contribution to understanding, insight and the generation of knowledge:

I think the whole idea of practice-based research is that we are researching *while* we are doing the practice, but it's not to go then: 'here it is'. It's a method for exploring and examining ideas and we cogitate ... think things through and discuss and reflect and move the work on and look into it.

I find this contribution to the discussion convincing. This research project arose from my experiences of digging holes to plant trees. Contextual, theoretical and historical research has helped me think about my practice and directed my choice of case study that leads to the next practical experiment, further thinking, scholarly research and further practice. Though the assessed performance during the *viva voce* examination will mark the end of the practical element of the thesis, it will also lead to new questions about performance that will generate more thinking and direct more reading. My scholarly research, pedagogy and practice will continue to evolve no matter what turn my career takes in the years ahead. My point is that the assessed performance should be seen in the context of the conclusion to the research project *and* the foundation of future research in an on-going process of discovery.

If my presentation to examiners is to evidence my research process it can include nuanced and refined iterations of practice previously described and analysed in the thesis providing it is performed in order to answer questions that were not answered by the original practice. The presentation of a video of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims falls into this category. However, if the evidence of practice is to reflect the aims of practice as a method of enquiry in its own right, then the final presentation of this research project should also include an element of original experimentation that is designed to answer specified questions so as I examine the precise form of the final presentation I will consider those questions. In terms of this written submission, any findings that emerge from the experiment can only be speculative but my aim is to make those findings evident in the presentation itself.

The presentation will consist of four 'acts' that will be presented simultaneously:

1. *Man Digs Pond*. A video of the performance in Reims plays silently on repeat on a large screen. The 24-hour show is condensed into a three-minute video that highlights the 'situated distance' between audience and digging performer. There is also a 'situated distance' between visitors to

the presentation and the video itself that aims to allow visitors to translate the performance into their own experience.

2. *Live Digging*. I will dig into a pile of earth and move the pile around the space one spade-full at a time. If they show a desire to help, visitors are offered the opportunity to experience the weight of the spade and earth and participate in 'wasted' labour.
3. *Keynes Text*. A poster hangs on the wall displaying the Keynes text that proposes digging through trash as a way of increasing GDP (chapter three). The aim is to negotiate the economics of digging and dwelling in the city using the written word that remains a primary method of knowledge generation in the university.
4. *The Plot*. A tabletop installation that displays five samples of earth dug up from five locations in the city chosen for their particular political, economic and/or ecological associations. The aim is to negotiate the ways that our geologies are owned and controlled in the city. Visitors to the presentation are offered the opportunity to dig the five samples and take home a sample from their chosen 'sub-plot'.

I will detail the methods used, influences and questions I aim to ask of each act in turn.

Firstly the chapter examines the spatial and social frames that are the common factors for all four acts.

Place and Community

During the four years of my research I have made various presentations of practical experiments to the wider research community at the School of Arts at Birkbeck. Initially, this required the formation of a community of practice orientated research students based around the on-line Dandelion Network of the School's research student community. I founded the *Corkscrew Group* within the Dandelion Network as a forum for research students interested in practice and along with staff and other students used the forum to organise and participate in meetings, seminars and 'show-and-tells' at which the contributions practical research might make to the generation of knowledge were shared and discussed. Importantly these experiences of sharing my practice with others has helped me understand how the exterior activity of digging might be represented, enacted and

shared as a social labour within the interior space of the university. *Practice Inside Research* was an opportunity to reflect on these experiences and on my scholarship and speculate on the ways that my practice might be made manifest in the gallery space.

As is the case with every practical experiment I have undertaken, the initial questions arise: what space will be used, how will it be arranged and who will the audience be? Apart from the examiners, the presentation will be open to all staff and students at the School of Arts and possibly a few interested friends and colleagues. I want to understand, as participant observer, how people who have not read the thesis will experience the presentation and for the examiners to have a social experience that is shared with a wider community. That said the audience will consist largely of people who regularly dwell in the university, and as such both the audience and performer are part of the same community that is concerned with the generation and sharing of knowledge. Each of the four 'acts' will be asking questions about performance, digging and dwelling in different ways but with the same aims of generating insight and understanding and most of the visitors to the final presentation, in the course of their everyday labours, will have the same aims.

To that end the cerebral atmosphere of The Keynes Library would be an ideal location for the event. I will display Keynes's text and views from the room, shared with Keynes himself, would make apparent the relationship between the exterior, where digging might occur, and the interior, where the labours of reading, writing and thinking predominate. The idea of bringing a dirty, active, exterior activity into the cerebral and tastefully designed interior of the Keynes Library has the potential to generate interesting tensions between the physical and intellectual life of the space. However, the Keynes Library has been expensively decorated and has valuable pictures on the walls and I was reminded of the email from Birkbeck Estates: "any damage will have to be paid for." If I want to hang things on the walls, use spades to dig and allow visitors to handle material, a more adaptable studio space would make any damage less likely and any mess easier to clean up. The presentation will therefore be designed for the School's studio space (G10). The sense of bringing an exterior activity inside the university persists since spades and earth are not the regular tools of scholarship and this is a theme that will wash through the presentation.

There are spatial elements of this presentation that can be traced back and translated onto previous experiments and the practice of TLT, Kaprow and Denes. Thinking through the spatial arrangement of the presentation in the context of G10 I was reminded

of Artaud's vision of how the place of performance can be arranged. With the simultaneous presentation of heterogeneous experiences in the context of academic enquiry, I referred to Richards's translation of *The Theatre and Its Double* and to Cage's translation of Richards's translation as it was presented in a studio space in 1952 at Black Mountain College. For Artaud:

Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it.

... The auditorium will be enclosed within four walls stripped of any ornament, with the audience seated below, in the middle, on swivelling chairs allowing them to follow the show taking place around them. ... The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations.³⁶⁶

This is not a perfect model for the final presentation. Swivel chairs are not available and I am more interested in a situated distance between the performer and the visitor rather than the performance moving through the audience in furrows. However, an audience seated in the centre of the room, with four rows of seating facing out from the centre towards the four walls will allow for four separate stages that have their own relationship between audience and performer. Visitors will be invited to watch or participate in each element and move between seats in their own time. Action will be occurring simultaneously, 'with sudden outbursts flaring up' when visitors choose to play a part in *The Plot*, for example. The *Keynes Text* will be displayed in close proximity on one wall giving visitors an opportunity for quiet contemplation in contrast to the frantic, speeded up activity shown on the video on another wall.

The spatial arrangement for Cage's *Untitled Event* (chapter two) draws on Artaud in obvious ways with the audience seated in the centre of the space and with dance, music, poetry, visual art and action flaring up around them and through furrows that intersect the seating. Cage's emphasis on the audio landscape led him away from speech towards the utilisation of everyday sounds: birdsong, industrial noise and with *4'33"*, the sound of a police car speeding by. The video of *Man Digs Pond* is silent so the only sounds will be made by myself as I dig and move earth, and visitors who move around the studio. I can imagine the digger establishing certain rhythms with the sound of the spade slicing into earth, footsteps and breath. I might break the rhythm to welcome visitors into the space and encourage them to speak among themselves. I will not enter into general conversation

³⁶⁶ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 74.

with visitors and aim to remain focussed on the task but on the other hand it is not my intention to transform myself into the silent performer of Reims so if visitors wish, there is an opportunity to engage in conversation. But I am also interested in the everyday soundscape of the city in which the academy dwells. Opening the windows of G10 will bring the sounds of the city into the room and the chance operations of weather, passing traffic or aircraft and the background rumble of the city.

What rhythms, narratives and experiences will translate through those open windows into the place and community of the presentation? That depends on events that I cannot control. My aim is that through the open windows, the chance noise of the city will remind visitors that we are in an urban centre where the ecology and economic rules of the house make it difficult to dig through the earth. In the studio room of Birkbeck's School of Arts, the visitors will negotiate their relationship with those economies by experiencing various manifestations of digging and the geologies of the city.

Guerrilla Gardening

There is a particular ethical dimension to my performance experiments that requires consideration and this is usefully viewed through the practice of Guerrilla Gardening. While my aim is to generate correspondence between visitors, the nonhuman and the artist, there is an undeniable truth that my experiments involved the occupation and transformation of land. Does my occupation of land imply a colonisation that was no better or worse than invasion by anyone else? As Richard Reynolds explains in *On Guerrilla Gardening*³⁶⁷, the word 'guerrilla' (from Spanish meaning 'little war') has associations with confrontation and violent resistance. Reynolds offers a definition of guerrilla gardening as "the illicit cultivation of someone else's land".³⁶⁸ I wish here to briefly analyse this concept in the interest of contextualisation of my activities within a wider social movement.

Guerrilla warfare is usually associated with small, localised groups of militarised resistance fighters who make attacks on larger occupying forces. Reynolds points towards the earliest use of the term: applied to Spanish *guerrilleros* who fought Napoleonic invaders in the early 19th century by preventing the French forces from harvesting the crops planted by the French on Spanish land.³⁶⁹ In London, at the same time, the 'Diggers' were resisting enclosure of the commons by land owning authorities such as the Crown, the City of

³⁶⁷ Richard Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening: A Handbook for Gardening Without Boundaries*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

³⁶⁸ Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening*, p. 5.

³⁶⁹ Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening*, pp. 5-6.

London, the Church and local lords and squires. As I established in the introduction to this dissertation, The Diggers' resistance to the enclosure of the commons is channelled through the action of *un*-digging ditches dug by those who wish to enclose land, and cultivation on that land.

The contemporary guerrilla gardening movement is often motivated by dissatisfaction with the ways that private or public land is used in the city and though they are always non-violent in approach, they also retain militaristic language. For example, one group in the city of Birmingham, documented by town planner Michael Hardman, is known as the 'F Troop'.³⁷⁰ The "seed bombing" of the Tate Modern in October 2015, when activists contributed to Cruzvillegas's installation of containers of earth by seeding them with wildflowers is given a prominent position on the home page of Reynolds's blog.³⁷¹

Some guerrilla gardening groups have overtly political aims and Hardman sees the roots of the movement in the UK in the 'Reclaim the Streets' movement of the 1990s, noting their digging up of the M42 motorway to plant saplings in 1998.³⁷² For Reynolds guerrilla gardening is primarily about claiming wasted urban land for the benefit of wildlife and the local population. For others, cultivation in public spaces is a more nuanced act of resistance. Paul Harfleet for example has been running *The Pansy Project* for several years. He digs holes and plants a single pansy in places where homophobic abuse has occurred: "I plant pansies at the site of these attacks and hope that they become tiny silent declarations of resistance".³⁷³ Harfleet has planted thousands of pansies in many countries and was the subject of a recent documentary film. On his website he details some of his motivations that are worth quoting here to illustrate the affective potential of illicit digging and cultivation:

Placing a live plant felt like a positive action, it was a comment on the abuse; a potential 'remedy'. The species of plant was of course vitally important and the pansy instantly seemed perfect. Not only does the word refer to an effeminate or gay man: The name of the flower originates from the French verb; *penser* (to think), as the bowing head of the flower was seen to visually echo a person in deep thought. The subtlety and elegiac quality of the flower was ideal for my requirements. The action of planting reinforced these qualities, as kneeling in the street and digging in the often neglected hedgerows felt like a sorrowful act.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Michael Hardman, 'Understanding Guerrilla Gardening: An Exploration of Illegal Cultivation in the UK', (Birmingham: Birmingham City University, Centre for Environment and Society Research, Working Paper No.1, 2011)

³⁷¹ See <http://guerrillagardening.org>.

³⁷² Hardman, 'Understanding Guerrilla Gardening', p. 5.

³⁷³ Paul Harfleet, *Enough*, Post on website. Accessed 6th June 2016, <http://thepansyproject.blogspot.co.uk/search?updated-max=2012-05-28T12:41:00%2B01:00>

³⁷⁴ Harfleet's website, Accessed 6th June 2016 <http://www.thepansyproject.com/about>

Here planting a small and delicate flower offers both resistance to homophobia and a pharmacology that helps to 'remedy' the situation. The project's negotiation of gender, identity, queerness and homophobic violence is translated through the associations of the pansy. Harman links the form of the pansy to the act of thought and contemplation and digging induces a melancholia and sense of loss that was apparent during the difficult moments of digging the pond in Reims.

Man Digs Pond – Seeing the Seers and Live Digging – Wasted Labour

The video presentation of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims reveals how an audience can experience an extended performance of digging when they are offered the opportunity to spend time in proximity to a performer digging a hole for a wildlife pond. I am asking if viewers of the video at a 'situated distance' will correspond with the experience of the live audience in Reims and imagine themselves outside, watching the performance (See appendix 8, memory stick video B or on-line: <https://vimeo.com/88080335>).

Watching a performer move a pile of earth around the studio room with a spade will ask how the gestures of digging and the labour and the weight of materials can be made evident when the activity of digging is translated from the soft ground of a park or garden into the hard surfaced interior of G10. I ask how visitors will respond to the activity that will feel 'out of place' or strange because it is not the usual kind of activity that happens in the School and earth and spades are not the usual materials of academic experimentation. In terms of human production, it might also be viewed as wasted labour, since nothing material is achieved. I ask if this wasteful labour might negotiate, in a *micro-economic* sense, the idea of 'giving something for nothing', sacrifice and the loss of what might be achieved if the time was spent productively by making or doing something 'useful'. Will visitors offer to help? Or will they watch?

Presenting these two acts in proximity is an opportunity for visitors to contrast the experience of watching digging on video and watching live action. This is not the first time I have placed the two acts in close proximity and it is not the first time I have brought spades and the exterior activity of digging into the School. For the seminar, *Practice Inside Research*, I displayed the video on a small laptop behind a miniature pile of earth and a tiny spade that visitors were invited to handle (Figure 4.1). Next to the miniature digging installation I also presented a selection of digging tools some of which were used in my practical experiments: I lined them up, leaning them against the white wall of the gallery

space (Figure 4.2). Several students from Birkbeck and other academic institutions simultaneously presented their practical research experiments. Critical discussions surrounding the installations helped me understand its affects and limitations and encouraged me to scale up the digging experiment and keep searching for a more nuanced way of presenting and giving material form to my research.



Figure 4.1 Mini – dig, laptop showing *Man Digs Pond* in Reims and Keynes text. Peltz Gallery Exhibit. Photo: The Author

In an effort to engage with the practice of digging, I carried 16 worn and dirty digging tools from a taxi into the Peltz Gallery. “I don’t see those in my cab very often”, the taxi driver commented as I struggled to manage the unwieldy, heavy objects. The tools: faded plastic, rusty metal and aged wood felt out of place in the taxi and I had to take care not to scratch the taxi’s shiny metal, plastic and glass. Handling a disparate collection of tools and carrying them from home to taxi and from taxi to gallery was difficult. I tied them together with rope and wrapped them in an old towel but they kept escaping from the restrictions I had imposed. As a group, they were unwieldy, cumbersome and un-cooperative, each with their own characteristic weight, shape and material consistency. There was a dance between myself and the objects as I bent down, wrapped my arms around them and pulled them towards my body. Sensing my struggle with wood and metal, passing pedestrians gave me a wide berth.

I thought again about the email from Birkbeck Estates: ‘any damage to the building will have to be paid for’. There were sharp edges, points and hard mass that would easily damage the pristine walls, floors and doors of the School of Arts. There was only about ten

meters to walk but I had to move carefully. The tools kept shifting in my embrace. I was grateful for the automatic sliding door into the foyer because I could not relax my grip to open a door without a tool slipping out of control. The tools seemed reluctant to enter the building or rather I was projecting onto the tools my own anxiety about causing expensive damage and my own anxiety about the forthcoming presentation. What would these tools say to visitors? Might they give a sense of the labour of digging or the economies and ecologies of digging and dwelling? Rather than suggest any particular narrative, my aim was to make the labour of my practical experiments evident to visitors. The tools bare the scars of use. Some are rusty, chipped and dirty and some handles are crooked (Figure 4.2). The installation also aimed to generate tension by making evident the paradox that here in the gallery and in the university these tools could not be used.



Figure 4.2. Digging Tools. Wood, metal and plastic. Exhibit in Peltz Gallery. Photo: The Author

I spent twenty minutes lining the tools up against the white walls of the gallery, trying different arrangements and orders. They felt useless since the shiny, hard wooden floor denies their reason for existing. These tools are happy when there is something soft to dig into but here they found resistance and to me there was melancholy generated by this dissonance. I fantasised about hacking into the floor. A couple of the tools I had brought could probably do the job. The iron bar I had used in Reims to extract a boulder from the ground, (Figure 4.2, third from right), would have broken the floor up, then the mattock, (Figure 4.2, far right), would have hacked into the concrete, wood, or whatever lay beneath

the wood. I could have prized a hole in the floor and jumped down into the basement to carry on digging. How far would we have to dig to get to earth? What treasures might lie beneath? What evidence of past lives? The spades remained at rest. The scratches, dents and marks on the tools offer evidence of their use but they look forlorn, leaning against the clean wall. The tools invite people to pick them up and put them to use but nobody does. Perhaps visitors are afraid of disturbing the definite but unspecified arrangement. And what would they do with the tools? There is nowhere to dig. For the final presentation, some of the same tools will be put to use and earth will be moved across the room.

During *Practice Inside Research*, against another wall of the gallery I established a small mound of earth, about fifteen centimetres high, sitting on the left side of a stainless steel sheet on a table (Figure 4.3). If constraints of time and space prevented a full-scale dig, this installation asked how it might be possible to experience a scaled down dig in the gallery space. Visitors were discouraged from handling the spades leaning against the wall but here the opportunity to dig is offered. Protruding from the mound is an equally small-scale spade. People are invited to 'play' at digging and use the spade to move earth and make patterns or mounds. I was asking what kinds of experience might be generated and how visitors would respond to the invitation to dig in the gallery. What would they do with the mini spade and mound of earth? Two arrows behind the steel plate offered a visual signal to visitors to have a go and suggested possible directions in which the earth could be moved.

Behind the pile of earth a laptop screen repeated a video of the 24 hour performance of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims. The performance is condensed into a three-minute video that speeds up the digging, making it difficult to focus on the superfast digger. Visitors can instead focus on the gradual emergence of the hole and the subsequent filling of that hole with water. Transactions between earth, water and air are made apparent in the video but so too is the audience who stand or sit in deckchairs watching the dig. The coming and going of spectators in Reims, who remain still while they focus on the emerging hole, are visible in contrast to what one visitor described as the 'slapstick' performance of the superfast digger.³⁷⁵

The mound of earth positioned in front of the video offered an experience of digging that contrasted with the experience of watching the video of someone else digging. The video shows an outdoor dig and a solo *performance* of digging clearly signalled by the

³⁷⁵ Video of *Man Digs Pond*, Reims 2013 (3') available here: <https://vimeo.com/88080335>
(Also on memory stick, Appendix 9, video E)

relatively still presence of the spectators. Inside the gallery, the encounter with scaled-down digging is both participatory and more intimate. In the video I am digging through earth and through the ground, whereas the small mound of earth sat on a hard steel plate restricts digging to the surface. Juxtaposing these two experiences of digging aimed to generate tensions but how were my attempts received by visitors to the Peltz Gallery? The visitors were other arts and humanities researchers who offered valuable feedback after the event that has helped me reshape and refine for the assessed presentation.

Discussions in the Peltz Gallery after the presentation were wide-ranging but I will focus here on the particular comments (documented in a digital audio recording by conveners) that have caused me to re-think the ways that my practice might be made evident to examiners during the final presentation. The following includes a selection of anonymous quotes signalled by quotation marks from scholars and research students that help me understand the affects, experiences and feelings that were generated.

The tools lined up against the gallery wall evoked a sense of romanticised nostalgia for a “good life” in the sense that they were not the kinds of tools that a modern “council worker” would use. The lack of plastics in the constituency of the tools and the use of wood rather than carbon fibre encouraged the sense of a forgotten pastoral utopia that was also referenced by the straw hatted Milanese during harvest in Denes’s *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes* (chapter three). The comments encouraged me to consider the manifestation of nostalgia in my practice. In *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes* the refusal to use in Milan the dangerous chemicals that saturate much of Europe’s farmland references a desire for a chemical-free agricultural past yet I argue the corporations and banks that sponsored the event are continuing to promote un-sustainable agricultural practices that degrade our ecologies for future generations. In *Turning The Earth, Man Digs Pond*, and some guerrilla gardening practices, there is also a romantic and nostalgic reverence for the manual labour of digging. This thesis begins with a deeply nostalgic visit to a beach in 1964 when I played with a bucket and spade and a digging adventure on the moon in 1969. Whenever a spade is handled and earth is dug, there is an almost inevitable glance backwards towards a pre-industrial time when labour was an activity involving skill, ecological knowledge and social interaction. There is a danger however, that a romanticised nostalgia can mask a darker reality.

My professional life is not about labouring for a wage, year after year, like the canal diggers of 19th century Forest Hill. The experience of life that consists of hard labour

without any prospect of alternative employment can only be imagined yet having spent many months over the course of my lifetime digging for a wage I have no illusions about the difficulty and physical hardship of 'back breaking' labour. I argue that this thesis is engaging with a romanticised nostalgia in order to propose a possible de-mechanised future but that does not necessarily mean more digging by hand. It is perhaps difficult to imagine a dis-automated, post fossil fuel future without more hard manual labour but the practices promoted by eco-agriculture and permaculture systems do not encourage more manual digging. In fact, they propose systems that minimise manual labour by using plants, animals and earth-dwelling life forms to perform tasks that have the same beneficial effects on yields as digging the earth (worm cultures being an obvious example). My proposition is not for artists and actors or anyone to start digging holes by hand for the next road tunnel, the next uranium mine or the next field of corn. It is rather to propose that when we perform the act of digging, whether for fun, a pond, ritual, wildlife or food, we are performing an individual act of labour that reflects a different way of living with the earth and with each other.

Returning to the presentation in the Peltz Gallery: am I simply offering the viewers a romantic, aesthetic experience of digging without reflection on the exploitative nature of digging in the real world and without suggesting alternative ways of dwelling with the earth? The opportunity to dig through the small mound of earth was seen by some visitors as a "desperate" attempt to generate empathy. The "chance to literalise" digging in miniature and the "absurd" weightlessness of what was referred to as the "little diggy bit" made some feel uncomfortable. I was trying to bring the experience of digging into the gallery but the pragmatic scaling down of digging felt to visitors like a "really troubling" attempt at a "bourgeois gesture" of labour: the artist "pretending to be a labourer". Others enjoyed the sensations generated by the installation that reminded one visitor of a participatory exhibit targeted at children in "the Science Museum". The variety of responses to the digging installation was gratifying since it suggested multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, there was a clear desire expressed by some to experience the "weight" of the tool and the earth; "It's the weightlessness that's really troubling. Really troubling. And particularly the fact that even the earth that you've got is bought compost as far as I can see."

The earth I used to create the mound was significant in my mind but this significance was never made apparent to visitors. The earth was extremely rich in nutrients and fertile. In Kaprow's terms, it was 'heavy-duty' social dirt. It was collected from a

community garden a few hundred meters from AMG in Sydenham, South East London: Grow Mayow Community Garden³⁷⁶ (GMCG). Earth from this garden will form a sub-plot in the final assessed presentation so I want to stay briefly with GMCG as the source of the earth used in this experiment and as a further example of the ways that land in the city can be dug to promote knowledge and capacities to flourish.

The garden has been managed by Iris Borgers since 2007 and is a place where volunteers practice horticulture, wildlife gardening, food growing and permaculture. 'Permaculture' refers to a way of dwelling and a social movement rather than a specific system of horticulture. Drawing on many disciplines, it involves a systemic approach to ecological design with a focus on "care for the earth, care for the people and care for the future".³⁷⁷ Situated within the publicly owned Mayow Park, Borgers pays a 'peppercorn rent' (a nominal sum less than £1 per annum) to the London Borough of Lewisham with whom she cooperates. Borgers runs the garden as a benign dictator, using her horticultural knowledge, social media and creative skills to involve a wide cross-section of people in the development and maintenance of GMCG including the long-term unemployed, those with learning difficulties, recently settled refugees and school classes. One section of the garden is open to the public whenever Mayow Park is open. Another section with small buildings, a kitchen and polythene growing tunnels is open to the public during weekdays and is rented out for private children's parties during some weekends. The income from private parties helps to fund the garden's public activities. Without going into detail about the social benefits of GMCG, I acknowledge it here as a place that has inspired many of my early experiments in AMG and Borgers has supported some of my digging activities with loans of tools and gifts of plants that I have used in my digging experiments. For this experiment, Borgers offered some earth from her garden. It is only on reflection and with reference to Kaprow's *Trading Dirt* that the importance of the source of the material has emerged. For *The Plot* in the assessed performance, I will ask how the constituency and associations of particular samples of earth might effect the ways we experience digging. For me, 'heavy-duty' social earth was being dug in the Peltz Gallery.

It is true that this scaled down digging experience, referred to as the "little diggy thing", offered no impression of the hard labour of digging. I can understand the "lack of friction" experienced by visitors. I was disappointed that the earth was perceived as being "bought"

³⁷⁶ See the Grow Mayow Community Garden website: <http://www.growmayow.org>

³⁷⁷ See <https://www.ipcuk.events/article/permaculture-climate-change-statement>

commercial compost, (“not like London clay”) rather than the ‘heavy duty social earth’ that had been donated by GMCG. It was clear that the constituency and particular associations of the earth was an important factor in the installation and perhaps visitors needed pointers to help them negotiate the significance of the material. The “little diggy thing” was missing the ironic reflection on digging that Keynes expressed in his call to spend public money on a project to dig through garbage. The lack of weight reflected an absence of the idea of economically ‘wasted’ labour or of sacrifice that Kaprow had expressed through his focus on the task. It lacked a negotiation of the economic rules of the house that assigns monetary value to objects, land and human labour according to abstract concepts of aesthetic or intellectual value as Kaprow expressed so clearly in *Trading Dirt*.

The three-minute video of *Man Digs Pond* that played on repeat next to the ‘little diggy thing’ was offered as a partial view of a contrasting experience of digging. The video was left untitled, without any explanatory text but I hoped that the difficulty of digging for 24 hours would be made apparent along with the irony, in economic terms, of expending energy on a pond that celebrates frogs, newts, dragonflies and water snails but provides no obvious human benefit. The reaction of visitors to the video was a surprise. The difficulty and hardship of digging and the movements of earth and water were clearly less important to visitors than the position of the audience during the event. The video foregrounds the pond as it emerges in the center of the frame but the audience, who are relatively still compared to the performer, are also evident as they enter the frame, stand and watch, or sit in the deck chairs that surround the action.

Visitors to the Peltz were drawn into the video of *Man Digs Pond* by translating the actions of the audience in the video into their own experience of watching an audience that is watching someone dig. They were intrigued by the idea that people would want to spend time watching the dig and this encouraged a sense that, as one visitor put it: “in a real life situation, and you see someone digging you wouldn’t just sit down and watch”. The video encouraged a sense that the activity of digging is normally hidden or ignored. As another visitor put it, “The deck chairs summed up the whole performance as staged and as something to watch that offered a *situated distance* [between artist and audience]”. The emphasis for these visitors was on the viewpoint of the audience made apparent in the video and on the revealing of an activity that is normally hidden. In this reveal there is perhaps an implied illumination of the transactions between earth, air and water that in the city are also hidden and controlled. One visitor was struck by the individual “encounter with

nature” in a social context but I sensed that my desire to engage with ecology was only partially fulfilled.

The video describes a particular relationship of situated distance between spectator and artist. TLT encouraged the participation of the audience in the action of performance but Beck and Malina were often disappointed by the responses to invitations to play a part in the action and in *Turning The Earth* established a clear distance between performer and audience, (except when Beck handed out handfuls of earth). Kaprow’s smaller, intimate performances like *Trading Dirt* involved conversations with participants that impacted on the form and direction of the performance, rather like *Man Digs Pond* in London. Like Kaprow, Denes negotiated a shifting relationship between audience and artist but in the mass participation of *Tree Mountain* and *Wheatfield* in Milan the authorial voice of the artist sometimes overwhelms a sense of correspondence between the installation and the community through which the performance of digging occurs. I argue that the situated distance between construction workers, the office workers in The Twin Towers and *Wheatfield – a Confrontation* allowed correspondence between seers and artist. This correspondence was reflected on a smaller scale by the situated distance between audience and performer during *Man Digs Pond* in Reims. Yet, in discussions after the Peltz exhibition, visitors also commented on the physical distance between the video of *Man Digs Pond* and the viewer of the video.

Visitors were encouraged to approach the table with the ‘little diggy thing’ and to view the video from two or three feet away through, or over, the mound of earth and miniature spade. For some, the juxtaposition between the two elements presented on the table was troubling: “I was disturbed about *everything* being piled on that table.” The same visitor appreciated the installation when they were able to situate themselves at greater distance from it: “one of the things I’ve been really struck by is how much more I appreciated the installation as a whole because I’m back here, seated looking at it than when I went up close and started fiddling with the little diggy thing”. The installations were presented in the gallery with several other practical research experiments so the space I could occupy was restricted. The close proximity of the experience of digging with the experience of watching the video of *Man Digs Pond* made it difficult for the visitors to correspond with the installation. I learned that the situation of the viewer in the gallery setting was just as important as it was in the live outdoor performance.

The video of *Man Digs Pond* in Reims evidences a very specific relationship between the performance of digging and the community through which it moves and It

illustrates my contention that, in the right context, people will sit or stand and watch a digging performer and that labour can be social without necessarily being participatory. There is no need to re-present evidence of the participatory elements of the performance in Reims or the dialogic transactions between the audience and performer that are documented in chapter two. It is clear from the video that the dig was undertaken by the performer and the community were able to observe the action from a critical distance, yet in the Peltz Gallery, the video was presented on a small laptop and was crowded out by other installations and visitors needed distance from the screen to appreciate it.

In the assessed performance I will ask how the experience of watching the video changes when it is presented in its own space, on a larger screen, with distance between viewer and screen. With a larger screen and more visible scenographic detail, I also hope that my costuming will signal that I am not performing a “bourgeois gesture ... the artist *pretending* to be the labourer” as one visitor to the Peltz Gallery commented, but perhaps the presentation *is* a bourgeois gesture of labour, digging and dwelling.

Feedback from the Peltz Gallery experiment regarding the ‘little diggy thing’ helped me understand the importance of being able to feel the physical weight and consistency of the earth and the importance of the source of that earth and whether as Kaprow said, the earth had been ‘worked’ or imbued with significance. In terms of weight and labour and building on the ‘little diggy thing’, I imagine a large pile of earth that is moved across the space using a spade. People could watch me waste time labouring for the sake of labouring or might offer to waste their own time and help with the dig. It would be an opportunity to see how the visitors to the event respond to the invitation to dig: what kinds of gestures and experiences are generated? Or will they ignore or watch the wasted labour that produces nothing? But this is earth to be dug, not given away. In another part of the studio, *The Plot* will assemble a selection of earth from different locations to give away to visitors. Firstly I examine The Keynes Text, displayed on the wall during the final presentation that asks us to consider the economics of digging through the industrialised urban landscape.

Keynes Text – Digging Through Trash

The display of the text aims to ask how Keynes’s ironic recipe for stimulating growth and his negotiation of the economics of dwelling in the city might be accommodated within G10. It is an opportunity to contrast the labour of scholarship and thinking with the labour of digging. Again, this will not be the first time I have brought Keynes’s text into the School of

Arts. During *Practice Inside Research* the text below was placed on the table next to the laptop and behind the pile of earth. (Figure 4.3):

If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths in disused coalmines which are then filled up to the surface with town rubbish, and leave it to private enterprise on well-tried principles of *laissez-faire* to dig the notes up again (the right to do so being obtained, of course, by tendering for leases of the note-bearing territory), there need be no more unemployment and, with the help of the repercussions, the real income of the community, and its capital wealth also, would probably become a good deal greater than it actually is. It would indeed, be more sensible to build houses and the like; but if there are political and practical difficulties in the way of this, the above would be better than nothing.³⁷⁸

The three parts of the table-top installation offered three contrasting manifestations of digging. The irony manifested in Keynes's economic pharmacology was included as a comment on the brutality of industrialised digging and a reflection on the UK government's continuing support for the fossil fuel industry and concurrent neglect of affordable housing provision. The text also aimed to speak to the specific history of the School of Arts with reference to one of its most famous former inhabitants.

Looking at the table-top installation during *Practice Inside Research* I was struck by a sense of overcrowding. Perhaps there were too many things occurring in the confined space. There was almost too much contrast between the video, the digging installation and the text. In close proximity but with no formal link between the three parts of the display it was difficult to focus on the different parts. I could either separate the different elements of the installation and take up more wall space or remove one element completely. The former was prevented by lack of available space and my exhibits were already taking up more of the gallery than any of the other works presented. I chose to remove the Keynes text because it was not strictly my own original work (though in this context it represented an important contribution to my research enquiry). The mini-dig and video were asking specific questions about their affectivity and I was keen to get critical feedback on my own practical experiments.

During discussions after the Peltz presentation I explained the original intention of including the Keynes text as a part of the exhibit. After relating Keynes's narrative of digging through urban trash to mine money, one visitor commented: "once you explain that Keynes hypothesis everything kind of falls into place a bit more. But I think without it, you're in danger of it being viewed in a very particular way." This comment reveals the importance of

³⁷⁸ Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment*, p.129.

having an element in the final performance that reflects some of the more dissonant political and economic resonances that digging can reveal. The quote from Keynes does a lot of work in terms of negotiating the economic rules that determine the ways we dwell. In its embrace of landfill, coal mining and the economics of urban life it presents digging through trash as a horrifying take on our economic priorities. In terms of our contemporary modes of dwelling Keynes's project is perhaps marginally less terrifying than the processes of hydraulic fracturing when our hidden geologies are drilled, fractured with underground explosions and then pumped full of chemicals in order to extract methane gas. Any attempt to represent in the gallery Keynes's hypothesis in material form could never give a sense of the experience of digging through trash. I will include the quote from Keynes as a way of asking questions about the macroeconomics of digging and dwelling and as a way of engaging with the specific history of the School of Arts.

My intention of displaying the Keynes quote is to show how digging through trash can ask questions about the ways we have routinely attempted to resolve economic collapse. My aim is also to use the social labour of digging to point towards alternative strategies that can help us deal with the ecological crisis. How might an installation at the School of Arts use the performance of digging to suggest the need to reclaim land and geology for the commons? Julian Beck gave earth from the vacant lot in Pittsburgh to the audience of *Turning The Earth* before creating a garden in the same space. He expected nothing in return and his gift represented a small redistribution of geology. During *Trading Dirt* Kaprow exchanged buckets of 'heavy duty' earth. In both examples there are transactions involving earth that has been dug by the artist and there are economies that exist outside the frame of the market. One is a gift and one is a 'fair' exchange. In the final practical element of this research project there will also be an offering or a gift of earth to visitors. The question is, what kind of earth will be given away? And how will visitors experience the digging of that earth?

The Plot – Digging Through the Commons

The installation with the working title, *The Plot* (for reasons that will become clear) is asking what kinds of experiences are generated by digging and receiving a gift of earth from a particular location. The aim is to generate both ecological and economic narratives and correspondence between the visitor and the selection of 'sub-plots' before them. They can dig with bare hands, (a wash area will be provided) or choose a digging tool: trowels and

small spades. Maybe there is a small bucket and spade like the one I used on Newhaven Beach in 1964. It will be rather like a sand pit that you might find in a nursery school or child's playground, and visitors will be able to play and dig but it will not be a pile of beach sand, it will be different kinds of what Kaprow might call 'heavy-duty' earth divided into separate plots. Visitors will be invited to take home a small sample of their selected sub-plot.

Sub-plots:

Heavy Duty Social Plot	From Albion Millennium Green Trust – London Clay
Heavy Duty Academic Plot	From Birkbeck College, School of Arts, The Courtyard, 47 Gordon Square – London Dirt
Heavy Duty Economic Plot	From The Corporation of London, Epping Forest – Financial Dirt
Heavy Duty Ecological Plot	From GMCG, London – Home Made Dirt
Heavy Duty Sovereign Plot	From The Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland, Richmond Park – Royal Dirt

By claiming a small plot of land for the School from various named locations that are imbued with particular meanings I aim to make the original ownership, the movement of the earth and also the constituency of the sample of earth apparent and ask what kinds of experiences are generated for visitors when they have the opportunity to dig through it. The title is drawn from the introduction to George McKay's *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism & Rebellion in the Garden*.³⁷⁹ McKay outlines the multiple meanings of the word 'Plot'. In the context of a specified area of land a plot is an area marked out on the ground or mapped with boundaries to delineate ownership, control or sovereignty. In this installation, five small plots of land are taken from their original dwelling place and moved through the city to be presented in five separate plastic containers in the studio of the School of Arts. The visitor will be able to see a cross section of the sample that reveals what is usually hidden beneath the surface and they will be able to dig and manipulate the plot using the tools provided or their bare hands.

In a literary sense, the 'plot' refers to a narrative that might run through a novel or play and be divided into sub-plots. The final assessed performance of digging in the studio of the School of Arts will plot the final chapter of this thesis and suggest ecological and

³⁷⁹ George McKay, *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism & Rebellion in the Garden*, (London: Francis Lincoln Ltd, 2013, [2011]) pp. 6-11.

economic narratives and social narratives that are translated into the experiences of the visitors. Each sub-plot; the social, the academic, the ecological, the economic and the sovereign bring their own narratives concerning the ways we dwell that are experienced through the digging and gift of earth.

Finally, a plot can refer to a plan of action that is usually directed towards the undermining of authority. The plot might be a secretive conspiracy but can also be a positive force for change. Digging through a little plot of Royal dirt in the studio room of the School of Arts is not a revolution but it can touch on a number of important questions about the ways we dwell in the contemporary city. Digging in the dirt can articulate issues of land ownership, access and migration, food consumption and production, gender, sustainability and biotechnology. As McKay claims, “gardening, gardens, flowers [and] planting have frequently been a terrain for ideological struggle”.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 9.

Conclusion

This chapter has plotted the aims and rationale of the final assessed presentation. The place through which the event moves is Birkbeck College and the studio room of the School of Arts. The community through which the performance moves is the staff and students of the School and the examiners. The experiments I present aim to make evident the generation of knowledge by practical enquiry into the performance of the labour of digging. Each of the four parts of the final presentation engages with digging in different ways and asks different questions. The skills and knowledge I have gained during this research project have helped me understand the ways in which the presentation will be received but only the final presentation will confirm or confound my intentions. The presentation itself will answer the questions I ask and generate further questions in the minds of this researcher and the visitors. This conclusion will summarise the aims of the presentation and speculate about the ways it will be received.

The video of *Man Digs Pond* offers a partial view of an experiment with digging in the context of a theatre. The video shows how a theatre audience experience a performance of extended digging and the aim is for visitors to G10 to correspond with the experience of the audience in Reims. The presentation of the video evidences my contention that people will spend time with a digging performer but for the visitors to the presentation it will also raise questions about how *they* would respond to the live action, about other ways that digging might be performed, about the social and ecological value of ponds and about other ways that landscapes might be transformed during a deliberately constructed performance event.

During *Practice Inside Research* some visitors argued that my presentation needed additional or different elements if it was to “illustrate” the multiplicity and nuances of my research. One visitor commented that there “was not enough” to suggest the exploitative nature of digging and the ‘little diggy thing’ needed to be more clearly related to the video. In G10, I have the opportunity to scale up the activity of digging and offer a situated distance between digger and seer. Leaving a few spades laying around the space or leaning against the wall will encourage visitors to pick one up and have a go in their own time but there will still be a clear delineation between visitor and performer/researcher. In the video displayed on a large screen nearby, a different audience in a different time and place stand

or sit and watch a man labouring with the spade. During *The Plot* visitors are invited to dig into plots of earth that are dug up from land in the city that has been enclosed and contested through the action of digging. They are offered a gift of earth from the artist and from the School. Or can I call it an exchange? Visitors will give their time and attention to my presentation and in return they receive a small plot of earth from their chosen sub-plot and add it to a plant pot or their garden in their own dwelling place, or throw it in a river or in the garbage. The narrative concerning the final resting place of this gift of earth is in the hands of the visitors who choose to take it home with them. The gift represents a small redistribution of our geologies and in the operation of loss, negotiates an economy outside the market place.

Visitors can choose a sample from the little courtyard at the back of The School where this research student asked to dig a pond. It is a plot that Keynes might have looked down upon from his library in number 47 Gordon Square. Underground pipes now carry the excrement and waste of the staff and students of the School: heavy-duty academic shit. Displaying *The Keynes Text* and revisiting Keynes's ironic reflection on wasteful government expenditure is aimed at generating a conversation about the ways that governments will have to re-imagine our economies if we are to avoid ecological disaster.

This research project will be celebrated by the planting of a tree in the courtyard at the conclusion of the *viva voce* examination, but it is also the start of a new project, new experiments and new questions. As my growth as a researcher, performer and teacher continues, I hope I will be able to return to Birkbeck on a regular basis to follow the growth of the tree planted after the *viva voce* examination.

Conclusion

This thesis claims that the performance of digging can generate experiences and affects that reveal and negotiate ecological and economic relationships that form the subtle social complex of dwelling in the city. I have argued that when digging is performed as a social labour it can be a self-realising activity that renders our imaginings tangible and transforms the social and material landscapes through which we dwell. In this conclusion I summarise my findings while pointing towards the future and the impacts of this research as applied to performance practice in the theatre. Digging I contend is a way that performers can reveal the ecologies of the city, ask questions about the economic rules of the house that have generated the ecological crisis and propose alternative ways of dwelling in the city. This conclusion will summarise my findings through the performance of digging by President Obama, Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Cameron and the other leaders of the G7 at the Ise-Jingu Shrine in Japan (2016). This 'heavy duty' political dig supports my argument that the performance of digging can be used by those wishing to justify and support the 'business as usual' economic model that dominates our ways of dwelling, creates great wealth for a few and brings ecological destruction to us all.

1. The Place of Performance and the Taskscape of the Stage

This thesis contributes understanding to the field of site-specific theatre. I have evidenced the ways that performances of digging can transform the urban landscape in enduring ways and intertwine with the specific conditions of production and reception that emerge through a site. I examined performances of digging in a vacant lot in Pittsburgh, a landfill site in New York City, a small park in south east London (AMG), Milan city centre, a Zen Centre in San Diego, the German city of Kassel and Birkbeck's School of Arts. This dispersal of geographical focus has complicated processes of cultural contextualisation though it has also illuminated the ways that the performance of digging can speak across geographical, political and cultural borders. I have also touched on digging as it is manifested in the early modern struggle over enclosure in London and in the classical theatre of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*. Given more space in this thesis, it would have been interesting to delve deeper into the history of AMG and the role of digging in the development of the space as it moved from common land to private control, part of the canal system, a small

farm, a tennis club and finally in 2000 it became a public resource managed by local residents. Digging in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* reveals political, ecological and economic relationships that might be the subject for further study. Again I argue the affects generated by the performance of digging are not temporally confined but can speak to the past and project ecological relationships into the future.

If there is one feature of digging that might be applied to all the performances I have analysed, it is that digging into the lithosphere asserts, affirms or contests authority over the place that is dug. When I dug sand on a beach in Newhaven aged 18 months I relished the opportunity to assert clumsy control over the materials I moved through. When TLT dug earth during *Turning The Earth* (chapter one) they were inviting the audience to reclaim the land for the community. When I dug a pond on AMG or in the garden of a public theatre as a considered 'show' (chapters one and two) I asserted professional authority and the rules of the performance over public land. When Kaprow trades buckets of dirt he has dug up (chapter two) he is affirming his roles as the experimental artist and academic that give him the authority to dig. When Agnes Denes (chapter three) digs through landfill to sow a field of wheat in Manhattan during *Wheatfield a Confrontation* she asserts authority that is contested by the local construction workers. 33 years later in Milan city centre the work is rebranded as *Wheatfield by Agnes Denes* and though the digging is done by hundreds of people, the authority of the artist is foregrounded along with the corporations that fund the dig.

The Diggers that fought enclosure (introduction) and contemporary guerrilla gardeners (chapter four), were affirming their capacity to assert control over the landscapes through which they dwell. When Prospero orders Ariel, the spirit of the air, "To do me business in the veins of the earth"³⁸¹ in *The Tempest* he is asserting his own rules of the house over the island by ordering the natives to dig. Finally, the gravediggers in *Hamlet* are kept busy by the battles between those who wish to assert sovereignty.

In the context of a deliberate and considered performance, digging can be about much more than asserting power or control over land. It can be about archaeology and uncovering the narratives and knowledge that run through our geologies. Digging can generate capacities and affirm our place in the community of people that dwell through a place. The Gravediggers in *Hamlet* exhume the skull of the court jester, Yorick. Participants in Kaprow's *Trading Dirt* dug up the grave of their dog and swapped the 'bucketful of Hyden' for earth from Kaprow's Garden. In Denes's *Rising Pink Clouds*, decades of rotting

³⁸¹ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2, line 257.

trash is brought to the surface and made visible in clouds of pink smoke. Economist John Maynard Keynes (chapters three and four) ironically contended that we should deliberately bury money in urban garbage that is then dug up as part of a job creation scheme. When a pond is dug, or a hole for a tree or earth is dug up to reveal a pathway through AMG there are assertions of the artist's rules of the house but there are also understandings and insights generated about the ecological processes between earth, air and water that thread through a place.

All the performances of digging that I have described (apart from Shakespeare's gravediggers) have been staged outside the theatre building and attempted in very different ways to respond to the ecological and/or economic conditions of the found site. Yet Allan Kaprow's 'non-theatrical' performance of digging and exchanging earth in the everyday locations of *Trading Dirt* has paradoxically taught me to see the theatre building; with its own conditions of production and reception, its own labours, ecologies and regulatory frameworks as an everyday place of work like anywhere else. *Man Digs Pond* at La Comédie de Reims was performed without words in the garden of the theatre but in the days leading up to the show verbal transactions with the marketing and costume departments, artistic directors, cleaners, the head chef, ushers, carpenters, lighting and stage crews, accountants and administrators contributed stories and associations to the experience of producing a pond at their place of work. This thesis began with TLT's theatre productions *The Connection* and *Paradise Now* and examined the ways that audiences were encouraged to join in with the performance. I return now to the taskscape of the theatre and the specific conditions of production and reception that are present when an audience sit in an auditorium facing a stage. It is, after all, the spatial condition that has dominated my professional performance practice.

This research project and particularly analysis of John Cage's *Untitled Event*, Allan Kaprow's *Fluids* and *Trading Dirt* (all chapter two) and my own performances of digging during *Man Digs Pond* have opened up new thinking about my performance practice in the theatre and specifically the ways in which the stages I have dwelled on are viewed as a heterogeneous and emerging *taskscape* that behaves in much the same way as the taskscapes of the stages for digging that were created in AMG and the garden of a theatre in Reims. During the opening sequence of *Bloody Mess* (Forced Entertainment, 2003 – 2012) for example, a show designed for large theatre stages, I lined-up chairs at the front of the stage and my fellow performer John Rowley moved the same chairs to the back of the stage. We were focussed on transforming the landscape of the stage in the way we thought

appropriate for the telling of our stories and the scene degenerated into a frenzied quest to re-arrange the chairs.³⁸² For the first rehearsal of this scene, the director Tim Etchells issued only one 'suggestion' that I paraphrase as: "Bruno, you set up a line of chairs at the front of the stage and John, you move them to the back of the stage." It was the kind of directorial prompt that might have been given to two stagehands whose job is to set the landscape of the stage for the actors to move through. A similar effect might have been generated if I had tried to dig earth on stage and build a mound at the front of the stage that is then moved by Rowley to the back of the stage and then by me to the front again etc. When I move earth around the studio room at Birkbeck for the final assessed performance of this research project, the landscape of G10 will be in a permanent state of becoming.

In *The Death of Character*, Elinor Fuchs emphasises the turn away from the human psyche towards multiple action occurring simultaneously across the 'landscape' of the stage as a signature style of experimental theatre practice: "The Landscape itself is the central object of contemplation. The result could be seen as a new kind of pastoral, one appropriate to the ecological age when humans are no longer the measure of all things".³⁸³ Fuchs is referring to companies that performed largely in theatres but her words could be applied to the exterior performances of *Man Digs Pond* or *Where Do We Go From Here?* where we can say that the economies and ecologies of the emerging landscape are the objects of contemplation with which the un-named digging performer corresponds.

Elizabeth LeCompte, artistic director of New York City's The Wooster Group (established by Schechner and LeCompte in 1975) articulated a methodological link between artists who work to transform the taskscape of the theatre stage and my own experiments in the exterior taskscape when she said in a press interview, "...I've had a vision of just doing landscape architecture..."³⁸⁴. I conjecture that TLT's Julian Beck was tempted to give up theatre and become a community gardener when he dropped his stage persona after *Turning the Earth* and helped create a community garden with local residents. When I dig a pond or renovate a pathway through AMG I am transforming the taskscape in enduring ways and using the same spades, picks and trowels as landscapers and gardeners. The visceral labour of digging by hand confronts the modern march towards oil-fuelled mechanisation and in that look to a pre-industrial taskscape there is an

³⁸² For video of the sequence and Tim Etchells comments on the scene; see <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-tag/bloody-mess/page/2/>

³⁸³ Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism*, (Indiana University Press: 1996), p.12.

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth LeCompte, "Messing Around: Off-Broadway's Most Inventive Directors Talk About Their Art," Village Voice, August 19, 1994, p.34. Quoted in Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 92.

inevitable nostalgia for a forgotten rural good life. LeCompte continues: "...It has to do with figuring out how to replant the earth the way it was. Returning it. You know ... Returning it to the way it might have been naturally." Here, we come face to face with a renowned performance maker's romantic vision of an idyllic 'natural' past. Denes's *Wheatfield* in Milan city centre embodies the artist's desire to transform the landscape through the idealised labour of producing a field of wheat. Kaprow too was interested in the heavy-duty earth that had been worked in his garden and he dug it up to trade with earth from another site imbued with nostalgia for a dead pet during *Trading Dirt*. In all these practices there is a glance back towards a lost 'good life' when digging into the taskscape affirmed our connection to the ecologies through which we dwell and individual digging spoke about social economies and collectivised production.

Yet my proposition is not a return to the way things were 'naturally'. There can be no return to a pre-industrial landscape. It is too late for that and there were different forms of exploitation and hardship that occupied the pre-modern digger. The scars of industrial production that run through our lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere have given rise to the growing acceptance of the idea of the Anthropocene and will endure for the rest of geological time. Out in the field digging can reveal transactions between earth air and water that constitute our ecologies and enacting the task can speculate about and enact potential future taskscape. That does not mean that digging cannot happen on stage or that it is not possible to negotiate ecologies and economies on a stage. It is only a matter of time before I dig on a theatre stage but the form of that digging will depend on the specific conditions of production and reception and the particular correspondence it wants to establish with the seated audience.

The large spatial scales of Denes's *Wheatfield*, *Tree Mountain* and clouds of pink smoke drifting over the city from methane digesting ponds in *Rising Pink Clouds* has encouraged me to consider the ways that my experiments could be scaled up: digging a lake perhaps or planting a forest, and I can imagine 1,000 ponds dug by 1,000 local collectives of individuals who do not normally have the power to shape the landscape in which they dwell. The scale here is commensurate with the scale of the public works programmes proposed by Keynes as a way of stimulating growth during times of economic recession. Yet Denes's work has taught me that such a grand project might miss the point. Perhaps they already have a pond. Perhaps they need trees for shade in the summer or decent housing or a wind turbine to provide clean energy or a field of reeds upstream to absorb floodwater and help

protect their homes or footpaths to allow people to stroll through their city in their own time. All the above projects might involve; the performance of digging, the generation of knowledge, the transformation of the landscape and affirmation of a community's control over their place and way of dwelling. But only *1,000 Ponds* imposes the artist's single voice over the community and denies the knowledge that already flows through it. When the stories of John John, Cameron, Richard, Corinne, Mikaël, singers at *Man Digs Pond* in London and visitors to the Peltz Gallery digging exhibit at Birkbeck (chapter four) are threaded through the performance, knowledge of other worlds is translated into the stories told by the artist/researcher.

In the case studies I have analysed, there is a focus on the artistic *and* geological upheavals witnessed on Manhattan Island between the end of World War Two and the collapse of the Twin Towers in 2001. The ripples of these creative disturbances were felt throughout Europe and North America and are also evidenced in the cities of Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, San Diego, Milan and the temporary city of Black Rock in the Arizona desert. In contrast, the focus of my early digging experiments was a small public green space in south London: AMG and the experiments have rippled out to Reims in Northern France and the School of Arts at Birkbeck in the centre of London. The performances I consider here involve the activity of digging in particular local contexts but the geographical spread of the performances evidences my argument that there are affects and experiences generated by digging that are not confined to the local but can speak across the political and geographical boundaries of Europe, North America and beyond. Digging for agriculture, burial, irrigation, construction and gardening are woven through the taskscapes of every society that stakes a claim on land and wishes to dwell in a place. Exceptions might be the few remaining nomadic societies that do not stake an enduring claim but move across the surface exploiting seasonal variations in the biosphere. Today's travellers are less likely to be nomadic herdsman and more likely to be refugees seeking escape from violence or poverty or rural workers seeking wage labour in the city.

For the contemporary migrant there is virtually no opportunity to dig the earth for agriculture or dig foundations for shelter or dig a pond for frogs. African and Middle Eastern refugees trying to enter Europe are confronted by barriers, walls and fences with foundations dug deep into the earth. Cities like San Diego, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Belfast and Baghdad are divided by high concrete walls or barbed wire fences set into the earth

that prevent the free flow of people across the city.³⁸⁵ For Marx, labour and production are the fundamental processes that make us human. When humans are denied a safe place to dwell they are also denied a place to dig, to make sturdy shelters or grow crops. If, following Marx, we are defined by what we produce and how we produce it then there are many forms of production such as the production of knowledge and the products that result from creative praxis that can speculate about how things could be and embody a different way of being. Yet, in the contemporary world, as Wendy Brown illuminates in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* digging foundations for walls is an essentially futile labour that attempts to assert rules over land that is contested.³⁸⁶

I argue that our ecologies are defined by the economic ‘rules of the house’ that determine who can dig where and for what. Nowhere is this more readily apparent than in the city centre where the economics of trade, commerce, work, leisure and domestic life have caused the transactions between earth, air and water to be tightly controlled, limited, enclosed and constrained. In the context of my final practical presentation I reveal how ecology can be experienced in the context of the studio by establishing small ‘plots’ of land from various locations in the city that allow visitors to get their hands dirty and feel what Kaprow might call ‘heavy duty dirt’ between their fingers. Earth is collected from ‘plots’ in London that have played a part in this thesis or were a part of the commons but have been fenced in, regulated and controlled by political or economic powers. One ‘sub-plot’ concerns the small courtyard at the rear of the building where my speculations about how a pond might be dug revealed both ‘unconfirmed’ movements of waste and the ‘rules of the house’ that determine who can dig in The School of Arts.

³⁸⁵ Brown, *Walled States*.

³⁸⁶ Brown, *Walled States*, pp. 109 – 114.

2. Communities of Audience and Performer

Artaud called for a 'total' theatre practice that surrounds the audience and performers to the same cruel degree. We can say that in their performances of digging and in my own digging experiments, the artists, diggers and spectators are experiencing the wind, rain and sunlight to the same degree. They move across the same territory and they hear birdsong, jets passing overhead and the same 'noise' (as Cage would have it) of the city. Yet, in all these performances, no matter who is doing the digging there is also a clear distinction between the experience of the artist/performer and the experience of the visitor, who in turn will experience the event differently to other visitors. Following Rancière, I have viewed the bodies of audience and performer as a heterogeneous community of 'narrators and translators' who correspond with the labour of digging and the transformation of the landscape that occurs during the event. It is the relationship between the artist and audience that led to Kaprow and TLT following such divergent paths in the development of their performance practice and looking at their work from the outside it is difficult to draw any methodological link between them.

In TLT's *Turning the Earth*, the actors were psychically and physically transformed. They sat on the ground in the vacant lot in Pittsburgh in a circle with legs crossed as if meditating. They each took a turn to take hold of the spade and in their stylised labour expressed their frustrations, pain and the suffering of the world through ritual dance, chants and vocal incantations. The performers aimed to reveal to the audience, who watched from outside the circle, the perilous economic and social condition of the seer and motivate them to reclaim the land for the collective. Kaprow's *Trading Dirt*, on the other hand, involved intermittent, casual conversations between the artist and people who happened to be in the vicinity. During these dialogic transactions Kaprow articulated his intention to trade the earth with earth dug from another site and his correspondents added their own narrative to the event by, for example, helping him choose the plot where the earth would be dug.

TLT used digging to educate their audience about the ways that they were being oppressed while there is a sense that Kaprow, during his digging experiment, was learning and performing *with* the people he encountered (a Zen student and a roadside vegetable seller). For Rancière, the distinction between those who claim to understand the social system and "teach it to those who suffered because of that system so as to arm them for

struggle,”³⁸⁷ and those who enable the spectator “to translate what she perceives in her own way”³⁸⁸ is the crucial distinction that separates TLT from both Kaprow and my own digging experiments. While digging holes to plant trees in AMG John John’s story is translated into my own experience of dwelling and into the task of digging. I was both performer of the task and spectator. When visitors to *Man Digs Pond* in AMG brought song or music of their choosing, they were contributing knowledge, skill and their own stories to the event even if those stories were not necessarily the ones I wanted to tell. This way of performing requires the performer to dwell in uncertain territory between spectator and artist. I was both seer and seen or as Ingold puts it when he talks of the researcher in the fields of art, archaeology, anthropology and architecture, I was a ‘participant observer.’

Rancière writing in 2008 sometimes uses very similar language to Kaprow to describe the kinds of performance practice that can free the spectator to translate the experience into her own life and way of dwelling. Kaprow’s most important writings are collected under the title, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Following Duchamp, Dada and Cage, Kaprow’s practice attempted to cut across the boundaries between the performance event and everyday experiences, labours and processes of dwelling. Rancière, likewise declares: “That is what the word ‘emancipation’ means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body.”³⁸⁹ For Rancière, the artist is like a researcher who learns from the seers and must also interpret or translate their stories. This does not mean that audiences must take to the stage or performers move through auditorium like in TLT’s depiction of plague in *Mysteries*. On the contrary, Rancière argues that the ontological position of spectator and artist inside or outside the theatre cannot be anything other than distinct but the “emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators”.³⁹⁰ When I enact the story of a man digging a pond in Reims in the garden of a theatre, I know the visitors are translating the experience of digging into their own experience of dwelling because they are doing all the talking and, despite the language barrier, I can hear and see what questions they are asking and I can sense how they are answering the questions in their own way.

During *Man Digs Pond* in Reims, when the head cleaner of the theatre, Corinne Gomes da Silva, helped me collect plants for the pond or when, with the help of Mikaël

³⁸⁷ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.18.

³⁸⁸ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, pp. 16-17.

³⁸⁹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 19.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Serre, a narrative involving Gomes da Silva was woven into the performance, then Gomes da Silva's experience of life, or her 'lifeline' as Ingold would have it, is woven through my own narrative of digging a pond in the garden of a theatre. Serre, likewise, brings his knowledge and skill to the event, not by helping with the dig or chatting with the digger, but by chatting with the visitors and a television crew who turn up (Serre's TV interview: appendix 8 memory stick Video D or on-line: <https://vimeo.com/88294433>). There is a constantly emerging heterogeneous landscape of performance in which the speechless performer creates a stage for himself and for visitors who chatter and move through the landscape in their own time and in their own way. Someone takes a yoga class next to the emerging pond at 2am. Another stands next to the resting digger and reads a poem. After the show, the marketing department of the theatre tell me they can almost never persuade regional TV to cover their productions. The performance of *Man Digs Pond* in the theatre's garden had allowed the workers of the theatre to translate their experience of labour into the show.

Likewise when visitors dug the earth to restore a pathway through AMG during *Where Do We Go From Here?* the artist/researcher who had tried the activity for himself in the days before the event did not dig with the visitors. I observed from a distance as the digging visitors who (sometimes) embodied in collective action and in their own time, an answer to both the metaphorical question of how to dwell together in the future and the material question of the pathway's direction.

In my practical experiments the landscape of performance is subject to an economy of digging as 'social labour' that is entwined through the ecological landscape of the garden of a theatre, a small public park in London or Birkbeck. The 'taskscape' as Ingold calls it is dug, and undergoes an enduring transformation that continues to weave through the everyday places of work and leisure. The thesis contributes to the fields of performance studies and land art by speculating about the ways that enduring transformations to the material landscape can be performed. All the artists I consider in this thesis use a social labour of digging to transform the landscape but only TLT have been interested in the psychic transformation of the *performer* or the construction of what Kirby calls, the 'character matrix'. During Kaprow's *Trading Dirt*, no one constructed an imaginary character. The Man in *Man Digs Pond* is only ever named in the programme as the performer, Bruno Roubicek. The diggers in *Where do We Go From Here?* were not pretending to be anyone other than themselves engaged in a deliberately constructed

event involving digging (an exception would be the actor, Mark Stevenson who passed through *Where Do We Go From Here?* while playing Caliban in *After The Tempest*).

As Hans-Thies Lehmann notes in *Postdramatic Theatre*³⁹¹, Kaprow and his teacher Cage were at the forefront of theatre's move away from the grand narrative, the fictive character and the written text as the starting point of theatrical production. Lehman compares relatively timid experiments in contemporary Germany, "... at a time when new paths are being forged in the USA at Black Mountain College: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allan Kaprow and others take the stage."³⁹² Of the three artists above, only Kaprow refused to actually take to the theatre stage but rather took performance into the everyday places in which we live, work and play. He used the 'everyday' sounds, durations and activities of life in the city to reflect the multiplicity and complexity of urban living and in his rejection of 'acting' and the singular grand narrative, helped found the postmodern turn in performance that unsettled theatrical conventions of time, place and character.

I conjecture that Mary Caroline Richards should be added to the list of artists that were forging new paths. She performed in Cage's *Untitled Event* in 1952 at Black Mountain College while she was translating Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* and left the proofs of her translation in the building site of TLT's emerging theatre in New York City. Artaud encouraged both TLT and Kaprow to reject prescribed naturalistic text. The former replaced naturalism with stylised gesture and a visceral energy. For Kaprow, the playwright's text was replaced with casual conversation and social labour as he found it in the chancy, everyday location of the street, park or workplace.

Contradictions and elisions between the desire and knowledge of the artist and the desire and knowledge of the community through which the performance moves can be negotiated on a local scale where there is space in the artwork for other stories to emerge. When office workers look down from The Twin Towers over a field of wheat being sown on landfill excavated from the foundations of their workplace there is a distance between viewer and artist that allows the artist's voice to be translated into the experiences of the seer.

³⁹¹ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Karen Jurs-Munby (Trans.), (London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

³⁹² Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p.52.

3. The Duration and Labour of Performance

The focus of this thesis has been on the transformation of the landscape and not on the psychic transformation of the performer or what we might call ‘acting’. There is a methodological distinction here that is reflected in the contrasting performance methods of TLT and Allan Kaprow’s Happenings and illustrated by Kirby who uses the action of sweeping with a broom to summarise the difference, though this comparison would be equally applicable to the action of digging:

Let us compare a performer sweeping in a Happening and a performer sweeping in traditional theatre. The performer in a Happening merely carries out a task. The actor in the traditional play or musical might add character detail: lethargy, vigor, precision, carelessness. He might act “place”: a freezing garret, the deck of a rolling ship, a windy patio. He might convey aspects of the imaginary time situation: how long the character has been sweeping, whether it is early or late.³⁹³

The focus on the task of performance rather than character or fictive constructions of time and place can be traced back *into* the theatre building from Kaprow, via experimental performance groups such as New York’s Wooster Group, through to the company that I have collaborated with (intermittently) since 2002: Forced Entertainment. In both of the above companies, the actor’s ambition to project the inner psychic state of an imagined character is replaced with a focus on the carrying out of actions or tasks within the emerging heterogeneous landscape of the stage and an ambition to establish among the audience a deliberate ontological uncertainty between the on-stage and off-stage personae of the performer.

The disruption to the idea of a ‘character’ and its replacement with a contingent and multiple stage persona is explored in depth by many scholars of contemporary theatre practice for example Fuchs³⁹⁴, Lehmann³⁹⁵ and Kirby.³⁹⁶ I realise now that since 2002, when I began collaborating with Forced Entertainment as ‘guest artist’ in the making of *Bloody Mess* my focus during the devising and performing of theatre shows has been on the carrying out of tasks; the labour of performance and very rarely about the motivations and

³⁹³ Kirby, *Happenings*, p. 17.

³⁹⁴ Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, pp. 169 – 176.

³⁹⁵ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 134-144.

³⁹⁶ Kirby, *Happenings*, pp. 16-17.

psyche of an imagined character. That does not mean that the spoken word is absent from the stage but that when I *am* speaking I am thinking about what particular tasks I have to perform in order to translate my story and the story of the show into the worlds and stories of the people who are sitting in the auditorium. This is usually a technical matter of physical labour such as projecting the voice so that everyone can hear (if I want everyone to hear) and being in the right place on stage at the right time (or pretending to be in the wrong place at the wrong time). The landscape of the stage might be in a permanent state of what Bergson would call 'becoming' (costume, lights, scenery, props, people and music) but just like the performance of digging earth for 24 hours in London and Reims during *Man Digs Pond*, during Kaprow's *Fluids* and *Trading Dirt*, during Denes's *Wheatfield* and during the opening sequence of *Bloody Mess* when I try and set up a row of ten chairs downstage and my fellow performer, John Rowley tries to set up the same chairs in a line upstage,³⁹⁷ the labour of performance distils down to the taskscape; the duration of tasks through the emerging landscape.

In the programme notes for *Bloody Mess*, the director of the company, Tim Etchells in one sentence echoes Kaprow's Happenings and Bergson's idea of continual 'becoming' when he says of the show, "Something happens, something unfolds."³⁹⁸ I wonder if Rancière read the following sentence when Etchells, addressing the audience continues: "And you're there to join the dots and enjoy". Joining the dots means filling in the gaps in what you are seeing with your own story. *Bloody Mess* toured widely in France (a co-producer was *Les Spectacles Vivants*, Centre Pompidou, Paris) including the final performance in Toulouse in 2012. When Rancière published *The Emancipated Spectator* in 2008, he called for a pedagogic practice and theatre culture that gives students and audiences the capacity to fill in the spaces between what they see and hear with their own narratives.

The performer's rejection of an imagined character matrix gives the audience a space to create their own character and join the dots of actions and tasks in front of them. For Kate Valk, a regular performer with The Wooster Group, this way of being on stage gives the impression that the character is 'real' rather than a representation of an imaginary character. After she saw *Bloody Mess* in Leeds (c. 2006) she commented of the performers:

³⁹⁷ For video of sequence and Tim Etchells's comments on the scene; see

<http://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-tag/bloody-mess/page/2/>

³⁹⁸ Tim Etchells, programme notes for *Bloody Mess*, 2004. Accessed 14th August 2016.

<http://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-entry/bloody-mess-programme-note-by-tim-etchells/>

... they don't need to have a mask. They have real character that comes in with them through the door. They walk in with it. Each one feels like the original article of something that could be a type in the future. ... what is it about those Forced Entertainment people. I don't see them being the kind of performers that go to blank and then build a character. They're not American, they're British. They have faces and bodies. ... Forced Entertainment says – god dammit, I'm here. Now. In front of you in this room. With blood coursing through my veins. And I'm sweating and breathing hard and desperate to tell you this story that may get interrupted. Aren't they laying bare their lives right there in front of you? ³⁹⁹

I would argue that the way I perform on stage as 'Bruno' in *Bloody Mess* or The Man in *Man Digs Pond* is no more or less 'real' than the way I performed the characters of Macbeth, Cyril the Fiddler or The Duke of Canterville in the 1990s. But the rejection of a deliberately constructed character matrix has the effect of establishing a kind of equality between audience and performer. The performer is not inhabiting a fictive personae that has been rehearsed and developed but is in the same psychic universe as the audience. The performer is spatially distinct from the audience but there is a deliberate unsettling of the traditional ontological binary between audience and performer and, I argue, this allows the audience to build their own story of who the performer is, what they are doing and why they are doing it.

When I dig a pond as a performance, I am not building a character but I am sweating and breathing hard and in the cold winter weather there is steam rising from my back, shoulders, chest and legs. At 4am in Reims I feel like my life is laid bare but there is only a dog and a strange woman asking for champagne to see it. There is a certain desperation to tell a story about a man who digs a pond in 24 hours or a desperate bourgeois gesture: "the artist pretending to be a labourer" as one contributor to the Peltz gallery exhibition (chapter four) put it. My costume and the creative contexts of art production might well signal a bourgeois gesture of labour or a "gentleman farmer" ⁴⁰⁰ as one reviewer put it but I am not pretending to be a labourer. I am rather trying to tell a story of a man who digs a pond. I am telling the story by giving form to that which is named in the title and my character and persona is not deliberately constructed by me but emerges between audience and performer as a heterogeneous process of translation and narration.

For Rancière, theatre where heterogeneous performances are translated into one another is on "an equal footing with the telling of a story, the reading of a book, or the gaze

³⁹⁹ Kate Valk, entry in *Bloody Mess* notebook on Forced Entertainment's website: (accessed 11th August 2016) <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-entry/fe365-kate-valk/>

⁴⁰⁰ Françoise Lapeyre, "Vingt-quatre heures en non-stop pour créer un bassin".

focussed on an image. In sum, it proposes to conceive it as a new scene of equality...”⁴⁰¹

The performance experiments I have conducted during this research project are in a sense borne out of desperation to find a way of telling the story of the planet’s ecological and economic chaos.

The thesis speculates about how we can move forward from the present towards a future when the labour and production that according to Marx makes us human, is directed towards the generation of ecological knowledge and new, healthy and diverse communities of narrators and translators. I am not suggesting that all performers must pick up a spade and start digging up their local park. Neither am I suggesting that audiences must join performers in the activity of digging. Rather, I am suggesting that digging to plant a tree, establish a pond or clear a pathway through the city are processes that are able to speculate about the human relationship with our earth, air and water and propose pharmacological economies of care and resistance to the chaotic pecuniary economies that make our lives in the city so precarious.

Richard and Cameron did not participate in the digging up of turf to clear a pathway during *Where Do We Go From Here?* but they saw the event from a distance and translated it into their own experience of dwelling and of life in the city and gave their time and energy to carry on the labour that was begun during the ‘show’. John John did not participate in *Man Digs Pond* and did not even see the pond’s construction but he witnessed a transformation in the landscape of his local park and in the months after the show he used his strength and knowledge to straighten the fence posts and tighten the rope barrier that surrounded the pond. In the summer of 2016 I noticed that the pond dug during *Man Digs Pond* in AMG that was ravaged by the claws of dogs and rocks thrown by children had been restored and was holding water once again. I am sure Richard was responsible. Gomes da Silva did not help with digging in Reims but she posted photographs of improvements she made to the pond after the event. These are not labours for a wage but self-realising labours that are gifts to the community and affirm the value of those that are normally denied the opportunity to transform the environment through which they dwell.

Kaprow rejected the architectural constructs of theatre and gallery to take his performance into the ‘everyday’ places in which we work, live and play in an effort to socialise his practice. Likewise, the practical experiments I have undertaken during this research project have occurred outside the theatre building. There is a clear difference

⁴⁰¹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.22.

between watching performance from a seat in an auditorium and watching it in a park, street or landfill site but that does not mean the theatre's stage/auditorium binary is not a social space and the labour of theatre production is not a social labour. If my career as a performer continues to provide opportunities to work in theatres, it is only a matter of time before I perform digging on a stage. I cannot say what form the digging will take or what experiences it will generate between the performer and the audience. This will be the subject of further study and speculative practice. I might speculate now that when I dig on a stage the audience in the auditorium will not feel the weight of materials or the heat of the stage lighting but they might translate the experience of seeing into their own experiences of digging, of gardening, burial, construction and dwelling in the city.

4. Ecology and Economics

If the intended irony of the title: *Man Digs Pond* was lost on visitors it could be received as an amusing entertainment that celebrates the achievements of man and produces an aesthetic object without challenging witnesses and participants to negotiate different ways of dwelling through the urban taskscape and without resisting dominant economies of production, consumption and dwelling. The ecological processes at play in my own work are, as the title suggests, signalled through the actions and ego of the gender-specified performer. Certainly during the twenty-four hours of pond construction that constitutes my own performance of *Man Digs Pond*, the individual struggle of the artist and his articulated body are foregrounded. Yet, in all my performance experiments there are elements that encourage the dispersal of agency away from the central performer and towards others: both human and non-human. I have summarised some of these dispersals above. Furthermore, in the same way that Denes decides that *Tree Mountain* only really begins when the hole-diggers have gone home and the trees are left to do the job, so the ponds I dig remain as features in the landscape for years after the show where they might continue to generate social and ecological relationships.

Keynes's priority was the stimulation of economic growth and a more equitable distribution of the monetary benefits of producing more, rather than promoting an ecologically sustainable economy. His was a pharmacological project that aimed to remedy the ills of private capital and the market and help them function efficiently. Economists

such as Tim Jackson⁴⁰² and Jonathan Harris⁴⁰³ argue that a few adjustments to Keynes's model can help us adapt existing economic structures to deal with climate change, and with the help of private enterprise and free markets reduce carbon emissions. Andreas Malm⁴⁰⁴ and Naomi Klein⁴⁰⁵ suggest that we need more fundamental structural changes to the economic model. Private enterprise, Malm argues, will never be able to profit from renewable energy that is sourced from the commons. While coal, oil and gas are difficult to find and dig up, they are also easy to make money from, since the economy depends on a ready supply and people cannot mine their own. Energy generated from sunlight or wind, on the other hand, is sourced from the commons.



Figure 5.1. Community Orchard, Albion Millennium Green, July 2016. Holes were dug for the trees in April 2010 (chapter one). Photo: The Author.

As Malm states, “... light and wind hang like a fruit for anyone to pick.”⁴⁰⁶ (I am reminded of the community orchard I planted in 2010 described in chapter one, see Figure 5.1). They are easy to collect for free and turn into energy once we have wind turbines or photovoltaic cells. There might be profit to be made in the construction of renewable energy collection and storage systems but as soon as the price of these products falls, as has been occurring in recent years, private capital will turn elsewhere in the search for profits. Industrial giants like Siemens, Bosch and BP have dropped their renewable energy programmes.⁴⁰⁷ In 2006,

⁴⁰² Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth, Economics for a Finite Planet*, (Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2009)

⁴⁰³ Jonathan M. Harris, *Green Keynesianism: Beyond Standard Growth Paradigm*, (Medford MA: Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper, Tufts University, Feb 2013)

⁴⁰⁴ Malm, *Fossil Capital*, pp. 366 -373.

⁴⁰⁵ See Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, (Penguin Books, UK, 2015)

⁴⁰⁶ Malm, *Fossil Capital*, p. 372.

⁴⁰⁷ Malm, *Fossil Capital*, pp. 370 - 371.

oil giant Shell announced the end of investment in wind and solar. “Why? ‘They continue to struggle to compete with the other investments in our portfolio’ – oil and gas, that is – “. ⁴⁰⁸ Drawing this argument to a close, it is I contend a problem of who controls the commons.

It is the control of our geologies by the forces of capital that has led to the crisis. The difficulty of controlling wind and light by those forces has hindered their adoption as a source of common energy. Some of the poorest countries in the world have the most efficient and reliable reserves of wind and solar energy but I argue that only an ideological shift to the idea of geology as a commons can halt climate change and the poverty it generates. Only if our gas, oil, coal, concrete and metal ores are used to build the infrastructures of solar and wind power generation can we hope for a future worth living in.

An individual who gives time and energy to dig the earth for the collective is enacting a social labour that gives form to a dis-automated ecological poetics. By facilitating transactions through the earth, air and water, digging is able to generate a kind of ecological order that generates non-human life and human capacity. Social labour of this kind is a self-realising activity that is able to express our creative potential and affirm our value to the community through which we dwell. When the labour is performed during a constructed event for the seeing non-digger, the labour of digging and its creative potential is translated into the life and experiences of the seer.

The ability of digging to negotiate the economics of climate change and the geological power of capital was highlighted by the recent meeting of the G7 leaders in Japan (26th-27th May 2016, Kashikojima) when some of the most powerful political leaders in the world came together to consider ways of attending to the environmental crisis, to remember the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and to plant three trees on the first day of the meeting. The ghost of Keynes hung in the air as the leaders of the EU, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, US and Canada called on all nations to end “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” by 2025. ⁴⁰⁹ Though Keynes’s economic theories have, since the 1980s, been largely side lined in favour of Thatcherism, Reaganomics and free-market economics, the social, ecological and economic chaos that is a feature of contemporary life has seen a recent resurgence of Keynesian economics as a strategy to counter the ecological and economic disasters we are faced with. The time scale of the promise to end public subsidies to the mining industry is hardly ambitious, and the word ‘inefficient’ allows for all manner of exemptions.

⁴⁰⁸ Malm, *Fossil Capital*, p. 370.

⁴⁰⁹ Karl Mathiesen, ‘G7 Nations Pledge to End Fossil Fuel Subsidies by 2025’, *The Guardian*, 27th May, 2016.

Nevertheless, it marks a sea change in thinking about the way that public money is being used to promote the mining of fossil fuels and a deepening of the ecological crisis.

To begin the meeting and to symbolise their unity the G7 leaders gathered together in front of the press for a tree-planting photo opportunity (Figure 5.2). The backdrop was a beautifully manicured park of trees and lawns. They stood on hard ground, rather than the earth and it looks rather like they are planting the three trees in a car park or large driveway. They did not dig down into the earth. The trees had already been positioned and it was more a case of moving earth from one mound to the base of the tree where it formed another rather incongruous mound around the bottom of the trunk.



Figure 5.2. (Above) Leaders of the G7 participate in the tree planting ceremony at Ise-Jingu Shrine during the first day of the G7 leaders summit in the city of Ise in Mie prefecture, Japan on May 26, 2016. (Photo by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan/Handout/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images) (From Left) Eikei Suzuki, governor of Mie Prefecture, European Council President Donald Tusk, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Barack Obama, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, French President Francois Hollande, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

One could analyse the scenic arrangement: the clean spades that are painted white and decorated with red, white and blue ribbons. Dressed in their regular attire: black shoes, and tailored suits, it is clearly not a task that they might undertake as a part of their regular work. For the nine participants that are engaged in the task there is a bend at the waist, familiar to diggers everywhere. (Trudeau is bending at the waist as if digging but his attention is directed towards the camera). As the body is directed towards the earth, there is just the hint of a bow and maybe of humility. These powerful figures on the world stage

are directing their energy towards a small, frail looking tree and in that contrast there is also a hint of humility. Of all the performances of digging I have analysed here it is perhaps the most widely disseminated. In its self-conscious acknowledgement of the audience, carefully directed staging and painted props, it might also be considered the most elaborately constructed and theatrical of all the digging performances I have mentioned.

The digging at the Ise-Jingu Shrine is symbolic, rather than productive. In economic terms it is wasted labour. I would not be surprised if the trees planted in the driveway would later be removed to make way for the leaders' limousines. Like Denes planting trees for *Tree Mountain*, there are cameras mediating the activity to worlds beyond the world of the diggers. Like the Man in *Man Digs Pond*, the diggers are wearing suits and are performing a task that is obviously not a part of their everyday work routine. One might add that, like Kaprow in *Trading Dirt*, when they symbolically dig the politically-charged, or as Kaprow would say 'heavy-duty political dirt' that is moved from one place to another, they are also negotiating the political economies of trade and global finance that reward the mining, transport and burning of fossil fuels at the expense of clean energy and sustainable food production. Keynes would be wondering how we ever let the power of capital control our geology.

The G7 diggers could be performing on a theatre stage that has been covered with gravel with an intricately painted backdrop and a fan offstage to make the ribbons flutter. Finishing with a glance to future practice and to dwelling and digging on the theatre stage, the G7 dig might prove a useful source. I can imagine me, as Bruno, the bourgeois artist academic actor, child of Thatcher's enterprise economy, standing in a suit and tie with a white spade decorated with ribbons. A tiny tree sits on the surface of the stage. I do not try and dig down through the stage but rather move a small mound of earth across the surface to the base of the tree. The stage remains un-dug. At the end of the show the curtain closes and the tree is loaded into a van and taken to the next venue. Not a comfortable life for the tree (maybe it should be a fake) but it will help tell a story of digging and dwelling.

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Video Documentation of Practice 2011 - 2013

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video A:**

Man Digs Pond, London 2011 (9') available here: <https://vimeo.com/68940812>

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video B:**

Where Do We Go From Here?, London 2013 (6') available here: <https://vimeo.com/66529235>

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video C:**

Little Ecological Arts Festival, London 2013 (3') available here: <https://vimeo.com/69891948>

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video D:**

Man Digs Pond TV Article, Reims 2013 (1') available here: <https://vimeo.com/88294433>

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video E:**

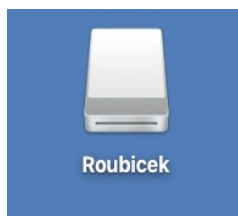
Man Digs Pond, Reims 2013 (3') available here: <https://vimeo.com/88080335>

Memory stick, appendix 9, **video F:**

Man Digs Pond, Reims 2013 (20') available here: <https://vimeo.com/88143569>

Instructions to View Memory Stick Video Documentation:

1. Insert memory stick into USB slot, (see instruction card with memory stick)
2. On your desktop, open memory stick icon, 'Roubicek' (below)
3. Open your selection from the list (below). Note: you need QuickTime Player installed on your computer.



Name	Date Modified	Size	Kind
Video A, Man Digs Pond London 2011 (9') .mov	18 May 2015, 17:09	2.78 GB	QT movie
Video B, Where Do We Go From Here? London 2013 (6').mov	20 May 2013, 00:16	91.7 MB	QT movie
Video C, Little Ecological Arts Festival - London 2013 (3').mov	8 Jul 2013, 14:53	48.5 MB	QT movie
Video D, Man Digs Pond TV Article, Reims 2013 (1').mov	3 Sep 2016, 13:29	11.5 MB	QT movie
Video E, Man Digs Pond Reims 2013 (3').mov	3 Sep 2016, 13:01	1.35 GB	QT movie
Video F, Man Digs Pond, Reims 2013 (20') .mov	3 Sep 2016, 13:24	1.81 GB	QT movie



4. Click play to view the video (left)

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – Artists Impression of Albion Millennium Green



The Green is surrounded by social housing, Victorian villas, civic amenities such as the library and swimming pools and small industrial units. To the East is the main London Bridge to Brighton Railway Line.

The pond, created during *Man Digs Pond* in 2011 can be seen in the centre of the image. Holy Trinity School is to the North, near the library. The orchard established in 2010 is dispersed around the Green.

Image by Dr Robert Bertram for Friends of Albion Millennium Green.

APPENDIX 2 – *In Little Parcels* by Dan Eltringham.

As presented as A4 size hand out during *Enclosure* at the *Little Ecological Arts Festival*, Albion Millennium Green, May 2013.

Dan Eltringham

In Little Parcels

“...little minds to please” - John Clare

words, pioneer encroachers of space, they were themselves rich & various, invariably imperative:

IN-TAKE

waste-breath

i mean, take-in waste

now ASSART the selvedge, clear a space, increment by increment, a BRECK here or there, “naturalised by customary usage”, i mean, can you ever remember a time when this wasn’t *theirs*? the elder can, but who’s going to ask?

1. *It is perhaps possible to say therefore that enclosure enclosed – as in, like, shut down, shut up – its own linguistic heterogeneity before it was called enclosure*

forget not TOFTS & CROFTS, nibbled increments around dwellings, chewing away like acid at the forest’s edge

well, it all sounds so innocent & primal when you put it like *that*

but what about the ‘greater villain’?¹

2. *The diversity of ways in which, between the 16th and 18th centuries, it was possible to say ‘enclosure’, depending on where you were, who you were, & what you were enclosing also implies struggle over the uses & meanings of supposedly ‘common’ spaces that is neither new nor safely in the past – Cf. Millennium Green, 2013*

which was once Sydenham Common,

which was once Westwood,

which was once Great North Wood [natural oak forest, unbroken], home to the vagrant & precarious, bandits, smugglers bringing goods up from the coast

thru the green lanes of Peckham

1605. James I leases 500 acres of the Common to Henry Newport for ‘improvement’.

“above 500 poore householders with wives and manye children greatly relieved by sayde Common and would be utterly undone yf yt should be unjustly taken from them”

1614. Abraham Colfe & one hundred locals march to petition the king at Tottenham Cross, while Sydenham residents take a more direct route, tearing down fences & filling in ditches. The brilliantly-named Innocent Lanier, Newport’s man, ordered servants to attack women collecting wood.

1615. The Privy Council decides it all seems a bit too much trouble, and declares the enclosure illegal. Anti-enclosure movement notable for an alliance between the violent resistance of the destitute and local bourgeois worried about where, if chucked off the Common, the squatters would go.

1754. “Persons claiming right of common” several times threw down fences surrounding Coopers Wood asserting rights of access for estovers [gathering fuel] & other customary rights.

1789. Other things happening elsewhere, but in South London a cheese merchant, Samuel Atkinson, builds the Sydenham – Peckham road & opens up the wood for houses. He starts with his own. He also shoots a local man, Michael Bradley, in the leg for walking where his grandfather had, who later dies when the wound goes bad.

1810. The Common is enclosed by act of parliament. In 1866 the Metropolitan Commons Act passed, which protected land with a demonstrable common use in the past from further encroachment.

¹ Cf. Anon, ‘The Goose and the Commons’ (popular song)

Bruno Roubicek presents the world premiere of

man digs pond

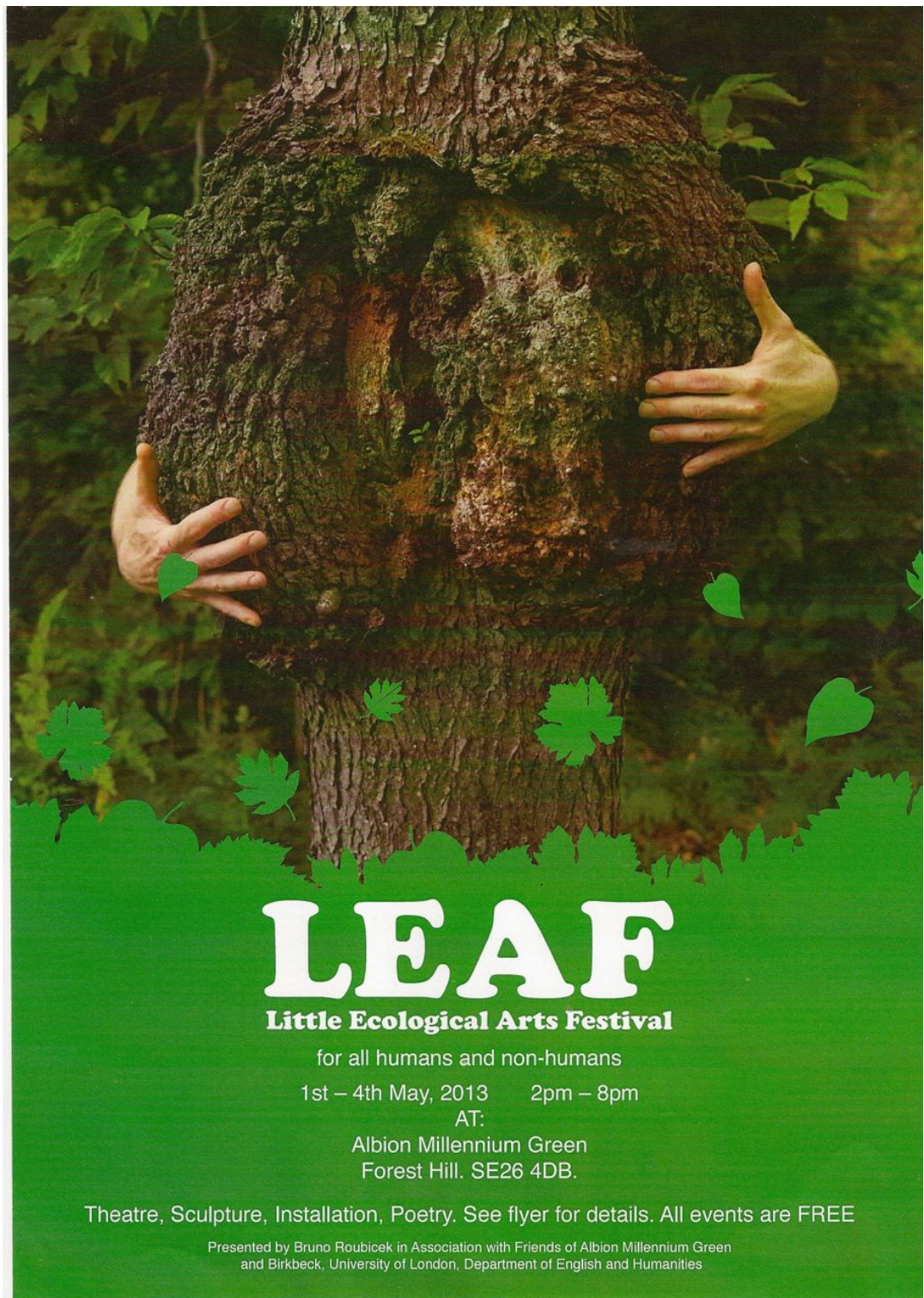
24 hour live performance at Albion Millennium Green
Albion Villas Rd, London, SE26 4DB

FREE Sat Nov 5th 8pm - Sun Nov 6th 8pm FREE

- Delicious hot food for sale Sunday 1pm - 8pm
- Platform for unplugged singers and choirs - just turn up!

Call 020 8265 2696 for details

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APPENDIX 5 – Programme for *Little Ecological Arts Festival*, London, May 2013

“Tree / Book” by Camilla Nelson – Interactive Installation
Make your mark on this interactive web of tree-related reading & writing materials
www.camillanelson.co.uk

“Enclosure” by Dan Eltringham – Installation
Dan needs more space for his things. He’s staked a claim on part of the Green. He might lease it to you.

“Labyrinth” by Maria Strutz – Installation
A walkable sculpture
www.mariastrutz.co.uk

“The Keithettes: Divination” by Beetle and Bird – Performance
London based Performance Company Beetle and Bird pay homage to their Irish heritage. The Keithettes retell traditional Irish Mayday folklore with the help of some snails.

“Insect Hotel” by the International Collective of Ecological Actors – Performance
You are trying to check in but the receptionist is busy building bed-space for some exceptional guests.

“After The Tempest” by Teatro Vivo – Theatre
The Spirits of Albion Island invite you to come and celebrate Independence Day! The tyrannous Prospero has relinquished control and the Spirits will be celebrating by planting a memorial. Discover lovers and kings, monsters and men creating a storm in the undergrowth. This will be a work in progress showing inspired by Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*

“Nest” by Nathalie Hauwelle (France) – Performance
A nest fit for a human is built from wood found on The Green.

“Gleaning, Learning and the Lean” by Natalie Joelle – Workshop
What does it mean to glean and what are the ecological implications of its gestures?

“I Surrender” by Rachael Henley – Performance
Knitting - Live

“Linus Slug” by Mendoza – Poetry
Insect Poetry from Northumberland.

Front image photo by David Eberts
design by Simon Foster

For more info:
brunoroubicek@hotmail.com

“The Last Cuppa” by Elaine Pantling – Theatre
There is comfort in a cup of solitude but there is much more pleasure in sharing a pot of tea with friends. Every cup, every sip stirs up a story and invokes a memory never to be forgotten...

“Where Do We Go From Here?” by the International Collective of Ecological Actors – Interactive Installation
Reveal the path to the future

“Sprites In Shorts” by Simon Harrison and Philip Engleheart – Performance
The festival finishes with Crystal Palace’s finest. Famous for their “Blessing of The Pond” on Albion Millennium Green

“Where Do We Go From Here?” by the International Collective of Ecological Actors – Interactive Installation
Reveal the path to the future

WHO?	WHAT?	Wednesday 1st May	Thursday 2nd May	Friday 3rd May	Saturday 4th May
Camilla Nelson	OPENING CEREMONY	1.45pm			
Dan Eltringham	Tree/Book	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
Maria Strutz	Enclosure	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
Beetle and Bird	Labyrinth	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
Nathalie Hauwelle	Divination	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
International Collective of Ecological Actors	Nest	5pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
International Collective of Ecological Actors	Insect Hotel		2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
Teatro Vivo	Where Do We Go From Here?		2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm	2pm-8pm
Rachael Henley	The Tempest		7pm-8pm	7pm-8pm	7pm-8pm
Natalie Joelle	I Surrender			2pm-8pm	2pm-7pm
Elaine Pantling	Gleaning			4pm-5pm	4pm-8pm
Mendoza	The Last Cuppa			4pm-8pm	4pm-8pm
Simon and Phil	Insect Poetry			6pm-7pm	6pm-7pm
	Sprites in Shorts				6pm-8pm

Please Note: These times are a guide only and subject to mysterious warping in the space time continuum.

For updates on schedule, please see <http://littleecologicalartsfestival.blogspot.co.uk>

See reverse for directions to Albion Millennium Green

UNE PERFORMANCE DE 24 HEURES DE BRUNO ROUBICEK
COLLABORATION ARTISTIQUE MIKAËL SERRE

PRODUCTION LA COMÉDIE DE REIMS-COÛN / REIMS SCÈNES D'EUROPE
BRUNO ROUBICEK ET MIKAËL SERRE TENNENT À REMERCIER CHAQUEMENT CORINNE
COMES DA SILVA ET SON ÉTANG D'OUËL, ILS ONT PRÉLEVÉ LES MICRO-ORGANISMES ET
PLANTÉS QUI PERMETTRONT À LA MARE DE PRENDRE VIE, AINSI QU'À TOUTE L'ÉQUIPE DE LA
COMÉDIE POUR L'AIDE APPORTÉE À LA REPRÉSENTATION DE CETTE « NATURE » ET XAVIER GROS
POUR SON TALENT DE PHOTOGRAPHE...

Bruno Roubicek est comédien et performeur. Il enseigne la pratique de la
performance expérimentale et mène un travail de recherche sur ce sujet à
l'Université de Londres Birkbeck. Il travaille comme performeur avec Forced
Interainment, Kate McIntosh, Almeida Theater London... Comme comédien,
vous l'avez peut-être vu jouer à Reims, dans *Crash Course* Chit Chat de Sanja
Mitrovic lors de l'édition précédente de Reims Scènes d'Europe et vous le
retrouverez plus tard cette saison, en février, dans *Les Enfants du soleil* mis en
scène par Mikael Serre.

Dans cette performance *Man Digs Pond*, pendant 24 heures, armé de simples
outils, il creuse un trou pour créer un bassin dans le jardin de l'Atelier de la
Comédie. Bruno Roubicek a établi des règles bien précises, il ne parle pas,
peut chanter ou crier de rage mais ne s'arrêtera pas tant que le bassin ne sera
pas terminé ! Bruno Roubicek a déjà réalisé cette performance à Londres et
souhaite la renouveler dans différentes villes d'Europe.



PROSPERO. - Vous avez l'air ému, mon fils, comme si vous étiez rempli
d'effroi. Soyez tranquille. Maintenant voilà nos divertissements finis ; nos
acteurs, comme je vous l'ai dit d'avance, étaient tous des esprits ; ils se
sont fondus en air, en air subtil ; et, pareils à l'édifice sans base de cette
vision, se dissoudront aussi les tours qui se perdent dans les nues, les palais
somp tueux, les temples solennels, notre vaste globe, oui, notre globe lui-
même, et tout ce qu'il reçoit de la succession des temps ; et comme s'est
évanoui cet appareil mensonger, ils se dissoudront, sans même laisser
derrière eux la trace que laisse le nuage emporté par le vent. Nous sommes
faits de la vaine substance dont se forment les songes, et notre chétive vie
est environnée d'un sommeil. (...)

La Tempête de William Shakespeare
ACTE 4 Scène 1

EcoRev' – Dans votre ouvrage *Politiques de la nature*, vous critiquez une
forme d'écologie politique qui consisterait simplement à inclure dans le
débat démocratique les questions sur la nature. En quoi vos propositions
se démarquent-elles de ce projet ?

Bruno Latour – Je ne crois pas en effet que l'on avance beaucoup en liant
l'écologie politique avec la nature. Cela dépend d'abord de ce qu'on entend par
« nature ». Est-ce la réalité extérieure de toutes les choses qui nous entourent ?
Est-ce que vous voulez désigner par nature ce qui est le pendant de culture,
de société, etc. ? Est-ce la nature utilisée par ce qu'on appelle « les lois de la
nature » ? Est-ce la nature comme campagne et sauvergie par rapport à la ville
ou à la civilisation ? Mon argument est, tout simplement, que nature et politique
ne vont pas bien ensemble et que, par conséquent, la dernière des choses à
faire, si l'on veut faire de la politique écologique, c'est de vouloir « sauver » ou
même « défendre » la nature. La nature est indéfendable !

L'écologie politique s'est pensée à partir de questions nouvelles, dont
beaucoup, c'est vrai, provenaient de l'ancien cadre naturel, mais c'est d'abord
un renouveau et de la politique et de l'écologie : l'ensemble des êtres auxquels
nous tenons, dans lesquels nous sommes mêlés, avec lesquels nous avons
une histoire commune. Quand l'écologie politique arrive, la nature s'en va.
D'ailleurs historiquement, c'est quand la nature conquise comme cadre extérieur
a commencé à manquer, que l'écologie est devenue de plus en plus visible
au sens commun. C'est-à-dire qu'on ne peut plus considérer une vie politique
des humains d'un côté et de l'autre, à l'extérieur, une nature qui servirait de
cadre – ou de décharge. L'écologie politique c'est la rénovation des ingrédients,
des sujets, des passions, des objets, des cadres mêmes de la politique, de la
vie commune, de ce que j'appelle pour cette raison la composition du monde
commun.

La notion de nature est soit trop occidentale, soit trop confuse, soit une unification
trop rapide des êtres pour pouvoir servir en quoi que ce soit de référent à la
politique. Vous n'allez jamais pouvoir dire « la nature veut ceci ou cela » et
entraîner aussitôt l'adhésion ou la décision des humains. Non, vous entrez dans
un espace forcément controversé – on le voit bien avec le climat – et donc en
politique. L'idée que l'appel à la nature va simplifier ou réorienter la politique, n'a
donc pas grand sens.

Propos recueillis par Isabelle Lamaud
EcoRev' - Revue critique d'écologie politique



APPENDIX 7 – Programme for *Man Digs Pond*, Reims, November - December 2013
(front and back pages)

Festival Reims Scènes d'Europe du 28 novembre au 14 décembre
7 scènes rémoises s'associent : la Cartonnerie, Césaire, la Comédie, le FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, le Mandégo, Nova Villa et l'Opéra

samedi 30 novembre

19H - SAFETY FIRST *musique*
 Eryck Abecassis / Olivia Rosenthal
 à l'Atelier de la Comédie

21H - GAIA GLOBAL CIRCUS *théâtre*
 Bruno Latour / Pierre Daubigny / Frédérique Alt-Touati et Chloé Latour
 à la Comédie

23H - AFTER TANYA TAGAQ / JAM SESSION *musique*
 Entrée libre - au Bar de la Comédie

dimanche 1^{er} décembre

9H-17H30 - WEEK-END BÉBÉS *théâtre jeune public*
 Hello Theater / Theater De Spiegel
 à l'Espace Thierry Meng de Béthény

14H-15H-16H - FRAC CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE *performance*
 David Evrard / Anna Adahl / Clémie & Joy
 Entrée libre - à la Comédie

17H - GAIA GLOBAL CIRCUS *théâtre*
 Bruno Latour / Pierre Daubigny / Frédérique Alt-Touati et Chloé Latour
 à la Comédie



**MAN DIGS
POND**
 BRUNO ROUBICEK

SAMEDI 30 NOVEMBRE > DIMANCHE 1^{ER} DÉCEMBRE 2013
 À L'ATELIER DE LA COMÉDIE

**REIMS
SCENES
D'EUROPE**

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MARDI 3 DÉCEMBRE 2013

Union

PERFORMANCE

Vingt-quatre heures en non-stop pour créer un bassin

« Man digs pond » : une performance « jardinière » à la fois physique, artistique, festive et participative.

Costume marron et toque de fourrure, Bruno Roubicek a plus l'allure d'un gentleman-farmer que d'un terrassier... Il est 17 heures ce samedi, et armé d'une bêche, il commence à découper, méthodiquement, des carrés d'herbe. Autour de lui, des transats, un feu de camp, des illuminations. Le jardinier-paysagiste, qui s'active sur la pelouse de l'Atelier de la Comédie rémoise, est en réalité un comédien et performeur anglais. Il entreprend de créer un bassin prévu pour développer, au fil des mois, son propre écosystème.

Épuisé, le dos en compote, Bruno Roubicek accepte de commenter son défi : « Le moment le plus dur ? Vers 4 heures du matin ! »



Dimanche 17 heures : la mare est terminée à l'Atelier de la Comédie.

Sa performance, « Man digs pond » (homme creuse étang), il l'a déjà réalisée à Londres, début novembre. Avec des règles : il ne dira pas un mot, ni ne s'arrêtera, tant que le bassin ne sera pas terminé. L'artiste étant pour un temps muet, c'est Mikaël Serre, son metteur en scène, qui explique la démarche : « Recréer la nature, à travers cette mare, en faire un moment de prise de conscience de l'environnement par le public, l'interroger sur cette terre nourricière qui permet de créer. Au théâtre, on est dans un temps artificiel : on joue dix années en deux heures. Ici, on est dans un

temps réel, celui de la fabrication du bassin : 24 heures ».

Performance animée

20 heures : le personnel de La Comédie sert du vin chaud aux spectateurs, qui admirent la performance physique de l'artiste qui creuse sans relâche, et transpire, malgré le froid.

Le public est invité à chanter pour soutenir joyeusement le travail du comédien. Deux jeunes filles s'approchent du bassin, chantent Piaf et... Eminem, puis tentent, en dansant, de déconcentrer

Bruno Roubicek, qui ne peut réprimer un sourire...

21 heures : arrivée de la chanteuse Paulette Wright et de son guitariste Vincent Roubach, pour un soutien musical apprécié.

On n'est pas resté toute la nuit... On retrouve Bruno Roubicek le dimanche après-midi. La mare est en eau. Il a ajouté du sable, des cailloux, a érigé une jolie bordure et y place des plantes aquatiques.

17 heures : fin de la performance sous les applaudissements du public qui entame une danse autour du bassin !

Épuisé, le dos en compote, Bruno Roubicek accepte de commenter son défi : « Le moment le plus dur ? Vers 4 heures du matin ! Cette création, c'est une combinaison entre arts et sciences. Nous autres, comédiens, devons nous intéresser à l'écologie. Travailler dans l'obscurité, puis dans la brume, c'est étrange. C'est un peu comme une rêverie. J'espère que l'écosystème va fonctionner ». Il pourra le vérifier en février : Il revient jouer dans une pièce de Gorki, adaptée par Mikaël Serre, *Les enfants du soleil*.